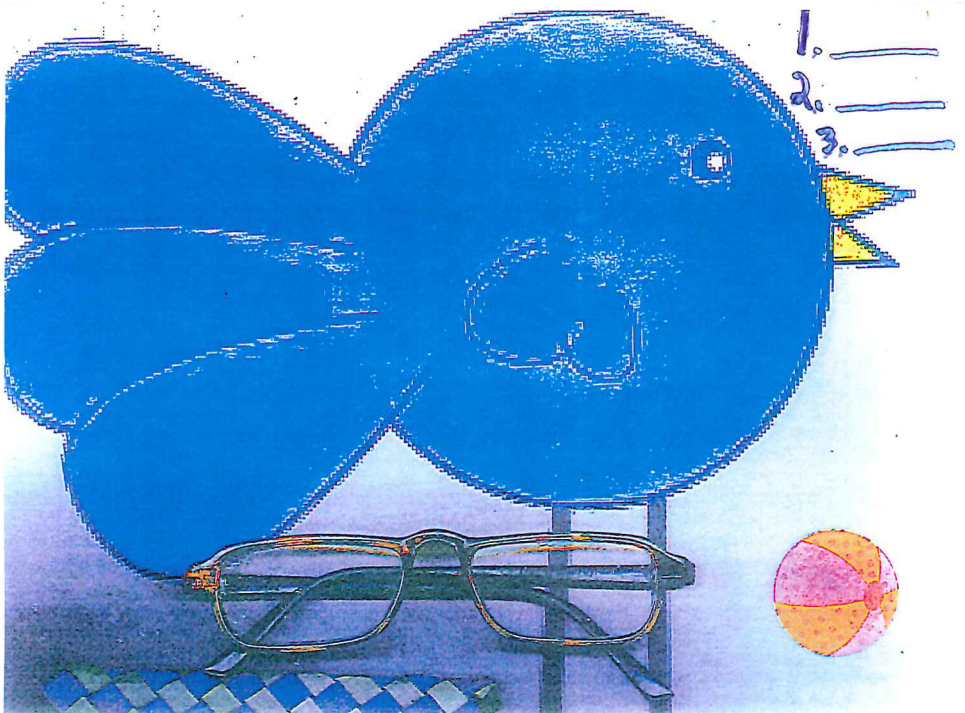


## Live Better Series: “I can live a vital and meaningful life.”

### “ACT: Healthy ways to address loss/grief”

Tom Lavin MFT, LCADC, ACATA



**Bluebird:** I can live a vital, meaningful life. And, I accept I will sometimes have pain, and other times have joy, in my life.

**New Pair of Glasses:** to change my life, and grow in wisdom, I need to look at things differently.

**Beach ball:** I need to stop avoiding my life by pushing thoughts and feeling underwater. By being mindful, I will let my thoughts and feelings come up and accept them for what they are.

**Finger trap:** It is healthy for me to “accept what is as it is”. When I struggle against “what is”, I trap myself and cause suffering for myself. Accepting does not necessarily mean I like it.

**1, 2, 3:** I can live a vital and meaningful life by choosing and committing to values that are important to me—NIKE Therapy “Just do it!”, make a plan, don’t procrastinate, take action. Letting go and letting be is also a way of taking positive action.

**Change, loss and grief are normal aspects of life. And, they can be difficult and trying. The word ‘grief’ means “heavy burden.” Loss and grief can weigh heavy on our hearts. These life events can be overwhelming and can shake the foundations of our lives—what we believe in and what we value. Our lives may feel shattered, but, if we respond to this process in a healthy way, we can come out of this crucible experience stronger and more committed to life and living.**

**Change, loss, grief:** (circle those that apply to you in the last 2 years)

--death of a family member, friend, associate, pet, other \_\_\_\_\_

--tragedy: murder, suicide, accident, traumatic event \_\_\_\_\_, other \_\_\_\_\_

--changes: moving, starting a marriage, ending a marriage, starting school, graduating school, job or career changes, financial changes, legal problems, family changes—marriage, separation or estrangement, illness, other \_\_\_\_\_.

**Common, normal grief reactions (circle those that may apply to you in the last year or two):** numbness, hard to believe, crying, loss of appetite, sleep problems, irritability, thinking of the loss frequently, confusion, depression, depression, guilt, shame, social withdrawal, restless, apathetic, loss of life meaning, relief, despair, other \_\_\_\_\_.

**Common maladaptive coping reactions (circle those that apply in the last year or two):** substance abuse, gambling, shopping, increased sex, eating for comfort, social isolation.

“ACT & Grief”, paraphrase, Dr. Russ Harris, [www.contextualscience.org](http://www.contextualscience.org)

1. Accept what we are feeling. (See list, above.) Whatever the feeling, notice the feeling, name the feeling, take breaths and allow the feeling to be there.
2. Accept at times we may be overwhelmed. The painful feelings can come in waves—they can rise up and carry us away before we are aware of it. Allow this to happen. We can let ourselves be engulfed by the wave. Also—step back and observe ourselves feeling overwhelmed.
3. We need to anchor ourselves. Practice mindfulness; notice the feeling, notice where we are and what we are doing. Notice what we can touch, feel, see, hear. This noticing can keep us grounded.
4. Connect with our values. What do these feelings tell us is important to us? What do they tell us about our heart?
5. Be aware of unhelpful stories we can tell ourselves, like “My life is over now”, “S/he’ll never get over this”, “I can’t bear it”, “It’s all my fault”, “I should/should not have done this”. Notice these stories hooking us in. When we notice it, name the story and let it go.
6. Find vitality in our pain. The pain reminds us we are alive. Connect with being alive and our values and carry on with life, with what is important to us.
7. How can we grow from this experience? Compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, letting go acceptance?
8. A grief ritual: candles, letter, photo’s prayers, telling stories, other \_\_\_\_\_
9. As waves of grief come and go, remind ourselves “This, too, will pass....This, too will pass....This, too, will pass...”
10. Grief takes energy—cut back on what we are doing. Scale back and look after ourselves.
11. Appreciate what we still have/who-what is in our lives.

*“In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all...Perfect relief is not possible except with time. You cannot now believe that you will ever feel better. But this is not true. You are sure to be happy again. Knowing this, truly believing it, will make you less miserable now. I have had enough experience to make this statement.” Abraham Lincoln*

*“...human beings demonstrate enormous courage, deep compassion...Knowing they can be hurt, humans still love others. Knowing they can die, humans still care about the future. Facing the draw of meaninglessness, humans still embrace ideals...”*  
*Dr. Steven C. Hayes, “Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life”*