

The Silent Weight of Grief in America

A National Study on Unaddressed Grief, Unspoken Needs, and the Urgent Need for Open Discussion.





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Welcome!

You're about to uncover "The Silent Weight of Grief in America." I'm Theo Boyd—author, speaker, and a woman who learned the depths of grief through a first-hand crash course. After a sudden and traumatic loss in 2019, I came face-to-face with a hard truth: our culture lacks the education to deal with the reality of deep, profound grief, and the lasting impact it has on all of us.

That is why I've partnered with the Center for Generational Kinetics on this national study. We surveyed 1,000 U.S. adults (ages 21–65) who've experienced deep grief or loss in the past five years to:



Explore how Americans are coping with grief or tragedy, and which cultural factors—like shame or lack of resources—impact their healing.



Examine the methods people turn to for recovery (therapy, spirituality, family support, etc.) and how successful those approaches have been.



Learn why Prolonged Grief Disorder remains misunderstood and how that misunderstanding affects healing.



Uncover my foundational principles for recovery, based on the strategies and signs of healing that guide my upcoming book, *Hope All The Way*.

I think you'll find, just as I did, that these discoveries are not just stats; they're signposts for a bigger truth. There is a negative stigma on how we treat grief that is fueling a mental health crisis in this country.

It doesn't have to stay this way, and I'm optimistic we can make great strides to improve the education and communication surrounding grief. So how do we do it? By naming grief, speaking about it openly, and creating supportive spaces, we can help each other move toward something healthier.

If you're grieving, I hope this report reassures you that you're not alone or "doing it wrong." If you're a caregiver, teacher, employer, family member, or friend, I hope you see how crucial it is to offer support to those hurting, based on the findings in this report. Let's replace silence with empathy, and ultimately - hope.

Sincerely,

Theo Boyd



Want more resources?

Visit ThinkTheo.com to see the complete, in-depth research study and to learn about my books, sign up for my newsletter, or connect with me directly. Together, we can start breaking the taboo around loss and show grieving individuals they have a community ready to stand with them.

Insight 1

Grief Never Ends - It Endures

A Lifelong Companion

We often think of grief as a moment in time, something that eventually eases over weeks or months. But our study shows a different reality. An eye-opening **99% of grieving Americans say the grief, loss, or tragedy they experienced more than five years ago continues to affect them today**. Even more striking, **41% say they still deal with that grief every single day**.

What This Means

Grief is not a phase—it's a long-term companion. Many people are still grappling with sorrow that began well before their latest loss. This constant ache can seep into every part of life.

How do you function at work if a wave of sadness hits you mid meeting? How can you enjoy family gatherings when certain memories can trigger old pain? These questions matter because ignoring grief doesn't make it fade. Rather, grief is something to be dealt with or it will deal with you.

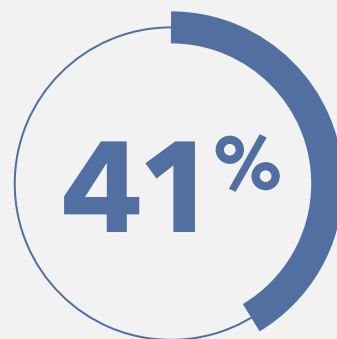
Why It Matters

When nearly all grieving Americans report ongoing effects from past losses, we can't treat grief like a simple wound that just needs time to heal.

Churches, counselors, and insurers should consider expanding support. Employers, too, could offer the same serious benefits they'd give someone diagnosed with a chronic illness. Otherwise, we risk turning a painful situation into a crisis. Grief deserves real, ongoing care.

Looking Ahead

If so many people say their old grief never left, imagine how new losses can pile on top of what's already under the surface. But with proper resources—whether spiritual, therapeutic, or community-based—grievors can find a healthier path forward. They may never erase the pain, but I believe grievors can still learn to live a healthy life despite it.



of grieving Americans say the grief, loss, or tragedy they experienced more than five years ago continues to affect them every single day.

Action Question



What support systems—both professional and personal—could you put in place to help those who still wrestle daily with an old loss?

How could you shift policies or attitudes to treat long-term grief with the attention it deserves?

Insight 2

Hiding Grief Out of Fear of Judgment



A Culture of Silence

Our data shows that **71% of grieving Americans have intentionally hidden their sadness from someone they love**. That number soars to **80% among Gen Z**—much higher than the **56% we saw for Boomers**.

Why hide? One reason is the belief that struggling to move past a loss means you're "being weak." In fact, **63% of respondents think society views those experiencing prolonged grief this way**. Naturally, this mindset pushes people into silence instead of healing.

Why It's a Problem

Think of the long-term impact if entire generations feel forced to bury their sadness. If Gen Z continues to bottle up grief, how will they know how to guide their own children or grandchildren through tragedy?

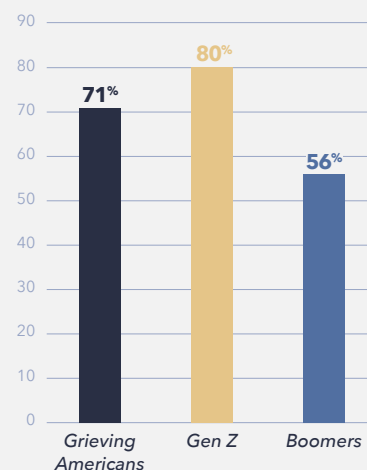
The fear of being labeled as weak leads to silence. That silence fuels shame, which can then fuel deeper mental health issues. Our culture must learn how to stop this negative cycle and start embracing the idea that it's acceptable, and even encouraged, to grieve.

Shifting the Narrative

Grief isn't a flaw or a sign of weakness. Just as our bodies react with feelings of hunger if we miss a meal, grief is a natural response to loss. By opening up conversations and sharing experiences, we can show younger generations, especially Gen Z, that it's healthy to express sorrow and confusion.

When we talk about grief, we discover we're not alone. That sense of connection can be a powerful step toward healing.

Hiding Sadness



Americans who have intentionally hid their sadness from someone they love.

Action Question



What can your family, workplace, or community do to reduce the shame around grief and encourage open dialogue?

How can you support Gen Z in learning that vulnerability is strength, not weakness?

Insight 3

Right or Wrong? Grievors Uncertain The Knowledge Gap

A startling **61% of grieving Americans say they're unsure whether their way of handling loss is healthy or unhealthy. Among Gen Z, that number jumps to 70%**—the highest of any generation. This confusion shows just how little education or guidance exists on what grief may look like or how to cope.

Why It Matters

If young people, such as Gen Z and younger Millennials, don't know how to grieve, where do they turn?

It's already difficult for many young people to communicate about emotional topics with their parents and friends. But grief? That could send them fully running for the hills, ignoring it altogether, or brushing aside their pain until it becomes an urgent mental health crisis within their lives.

Churches, employers, and healthcare providers can all help by offering resources that walk people through the difference between healthy and unhealthy ways of grieving—this can be counseling, structured support groups, or simply offering a space for speakers to educate individuals and remove the shame of feeling grief in the first place.

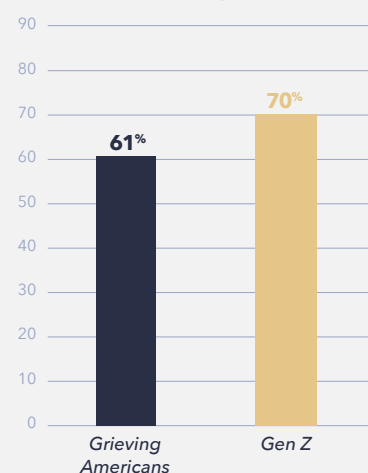
A Call for Education

Grief is part of life, yet we rarely teach people how to handle it.

Society does not build us to be accustomed to asking about grief and coping with loss. We don't ask younger generations how they're doing with the loss of a parent, or even a pet, in the same way we would ask about their career goals or financial plans. The data in this report proves we should.

If 61% of people navigating grief feel lost, imagine the relief if they have clear, trustworthy guidance. Employers could include grief support benefits. Schools and churches could address the basics of mourning. With enough understanding, Gen Z and everyone else could see that it's possible to heal and live well—even after painful losses.

Handling Loss



Americans say they're unsure whether their way of handling loss is healthy or unhealthy.

Action Question



What practical steps—like workplace benefits, community seminars, or open-door policies—can you take to help people learn healthy grieving?

What are ways you could reach Gen Z so they know they aren't alone and have real tools for healing?

Insight 4

Caring Hearts, Uncertain Hands

A Shared Challenge

Ever stare at a long to-do list and feel overwhelmed, yet you're not sure where to begin? Grief can bring that same sense of confusion—not only for those who mourn, but also for the people who want to help.

According to our data, **81% of grieving Americans say people genuinely want to help but don't know where to start.** This feeling is even stronger among women: **85% versus 78% of men.** We often see loved ones offering the cursory thoughts, prayers, or well-intentioned advice, but may not have the slightest clue what truly helps.

It's not just the griever who feels lost—everyone around them feels it, too.

Why This Matters

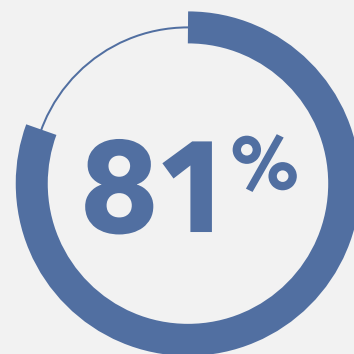
If caregivers, friends, and family had clearer guidance on what helps (and what hurts), they could do more than offer words that are fleeting in the moment and often detrimental. They could become lifelines who provide space to share memories or vent anger and sorrow, without judgment.

When support is offered in a healthy way, it can ease the burden and promote a sense of stability.

Education as a Solution

We can't assume empathy alone is enough. Small acts—like learning the right language to use, or understanding why some griever withdraw—can have a big impact. Employers could train managers on how to handle tough conversations about loss, while religious groups or community centers could hold grief awareness sessions.

With the right knowledge, people can move from “I'm here if you need anything” to actually showing up in practical ways, whether it's delivering a meal or simply listening without trying to offer a solution or remedy.



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Action Question



What educational programs or simple awareness tools can you set up so that friends, family, and colleagues know how to help a grieving person?

How can we stop saying, “I wish there was something I could do,” and replace it with “I know what I can do.”

Insight 5

Giving Grief a Voice

A Collective Cry

Many grieverers feel stuck in a world that doesn't make room for open conversations about sorrow. Instead of community and caring, they often find themselves trying to move on quietly. However, our data found that **84% of grieving Americans said they wish we could talk more openly about grief, loss, or tragedy.** This is not just a statistic—it's a silent plea for help.

Breaking the Taboo

Much like a child that craves structure, grieverers crave education, understanding, and a sense of solidarity. Yet, generations of silence and hush-hush behavior around death and loss have left us unequipped and ill-prepared to deal with this everyday reality.

People are hurting, but they don't speak up. They long for relief, but they're not sure where to look. When 84% of individuals say they want society to address grief head-on, it's time we stop looking the other way.

Why It Matters

Grief doesn't have to be a hidden burden, and it shouldn't be the new "silent killer."

When grieving Americans can share their stories without shame, they're more likely to heal in healthier ways. Talking about loss may feel uncomfortable at first, but it also opens doors to comfort, empathy, and real help for those who need it most.

Our research uncovered several preferred strategies for coping or recovering from grief, including journaling or writing (96% of Boomers!), reading, exercising, and time with pets. So, the question is, how can we as a society do a better job of helping grieverers find the outlets they need to address grief?



84% of grieving Americans said they wish we could talk more openly about grief, loss, or tragedy.



Action Question

What steps could your community—whether it's your neighborhood, workplace, or circle of friends—take to bring grief into the light and foster open, honest dialogue?

Insight 6

The Overlooked Link Between Grief and Mental Health

Struggling in Silence

A striking **70% of grieving Americans** say they feel pressured to bottle up or hide their sorrow. Younger Millennials lead the pack at 79%, while 59% of Boomers feel the same.

It's not because these younger Millennials don't realize they're suffering. They absolutely do. In fact, **80% of grieving Americans** believe that coping with and recovering from grief is an overlooked part of our mental health landscape.

Why It Matters

Sure, "mental health" is a major buzzword these days, but we have to ask ourselves why we're failing so miserably to address one of its key components?

The data suggests that many people—especially younger Gen Z, who are as young as age 21—are compartmentalizing grief. They push it aside to move on with life, but that's like throwing all your junk into your closet and telling Mom your room is clean.

When ignored, grief will linger and it will quietly take its toll. If employers and healthcare providers overlook grief, they also overlook one of the main causes of anxiety, depression, and other mental health crises.

A Call to Acknowledge Grief

If 80% of grieverers think our culture doesn't see how integral addressing grief is to mental well-being, then we must do something to change that.

With better education, more open dialogue, and supportive policies—like flexible bereavement leave and dedicated grief resources—we can stop treating grief like a side note and start recognizing it as a central piece of this nation's mental health.



70%

of grieving Americans say they feel pressured to bottle up or hide their sorrow.

Action Question



How can workplaces, families, and healthcare providers normalize conversations about grief and integrate them into broader mental health efforts?

What immediate steps can you take to include grief support as a critical factor in overall wellness?

Insight 7

Shedding Light on Prolonged Grief Disorder



Recognizing a Real Condition

According to our study, **80% of grieving Americans say employers should offer specific resources for employees coping with Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD).** Another **81% believe PGD is far more common than people realize.** Yet many griever feel they have nowhere to turn, especially at work, where policies often end with basic bereavement leave.

Why It Matters

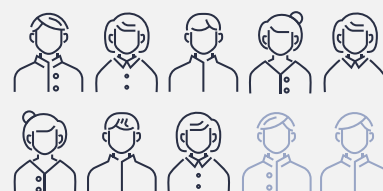
Imagine struggling with grief so intense that it's nearly impossible to get work done, or sometimes, even get out of bed in the morning. That's PGD. And once griever learn this type of grief has a name—and discover they aren't "crazy" for feeling stuck—they can begin their path to genuine healing.

Employers who step up and provide resources show they value their workforce as people, not just job titles. This impact doesn't only help individual employees, but it builds trust, loyalty, and teamwork across the organization.

A Role for Employers

Most workplaces don't extend support for grief or loss beyond offering a few days off. But think of the benefits if managers knew how to recognize prolonged grief, and then offered flexible schedules, or connected employees to mental health professionals to address it.

By acknowledging PGD, companies could help normalize the conversation around extended grief while enhancing overall well-being. After all, a healthy, supported employee is more likely to be creative, collaborative, and committed.



80% of grieving Americans say employers should offer specific resources for employees coping with PGD.

Action Question



What steps can your organization take to move beyond basic bereavement policies and address long-term or complicated grief?

How might you educate employees so they know PGD is real and treatable?

Insight 8

When Society Labels Grief as Something Else

Alone and Misunderstood

A sobering **75% of grieving Americans say they'd rather grieve alone than risk burdening others**. Meanwhile, **79% wish the media would share more about grief and how to cope with it**.

But instead of recognizing sadness for what it is, **43% of griever report being labeled as "depressed" or "suicidal" by people around them**—even though they're simply dealing with sorrow, not necessarily a clinical mental illness.

When we mislabel sadness, or worse, brush it aside, we drive individuals toward isolation and deprive them of much-needed support.

Society's Silence

Why does this happen?

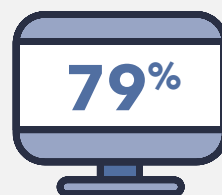
Partly because we rarely see open discussions of grief in news segments, social media, or entertainment. It's easier to slap on a label like "depressed" than to acknowledge that sadness is a normal emotional state—especially after a loss.

There's also a communal element at play here. Humans are pack animals. We are meant to live in close proximity and be engaged with other people. We used to gather on front porches and at neighborhood cookouts and talk face-to-face about our struggles. Now we chat through screens, and that barrier can make it all too easy to misunderstand or dismiss someone's pain.

Without honest dialogue, grievers retreat, and loneliness intensifies.

A Path Forward

By fostering open conversations and educating the medical community, hospice workers, and the media about grief, we can help grieving Americans find healthier ways forward. It's not about giving everyone a depression diagnosis, it's simply about acknowledging a natural response to loss—and offering empathy instead of judgment or a prescription medication.



of grieving Americans wish the media would share more about grief and how to cope with it.

Action Question



How can you encourage spaces—on social media, in the workplace, or in healthcare—where sadness is seen as acceptable, and where grieving people don't feel rushed toward a quick fix or a drastic label?

What small changes can you make to shift the conversation around grief from silence to understanding?

Insight 9

When Grief Meets Relationships -Don't Ignore Red Flags

Seeing the Signs

When people mourn, they often focus on the loss of a loved one—like a parent, sibling, spouse, or friend. Yet unhealthy or toxic relationships can also cause profound sadness and, in some cases, divorce. Grief can even weigh down a relationship before it begins if someone is already carrying unresolved sorrow. Sometimes, those dealing with unprocessed loss believe any relationship may ease the pain, not realizing it could add more difficulties down the line.

According to our study of 1,000 U.S. adults (ages 21–65) who've faced a major loss in the past five years, **71% of women, compared to 58% of men, say they spotted red flags early on in a relationship but ignored them**—only to end up divorced. This finding matters for anyone holding onto past grief while hoping a new partner can fix it.

When we push aside gut feelings or cling to a relationship in the hope that grief and conflict will magically resolve, we risk deeper heartache for both partners and any children involved.

Why It Matters

Unresolved grief introduces added emotional strain into relationships and can be amplified in relationships that are already fragile. In turn, it can shape the mental health and well-being of future generations. Society often puts unspoken pressure on women to “tough it out” in a relationship, leaving them responsible for nurturing something that may have been shaky from the start. They may also feel compelled to hide their own emotions to care for others, which can stall genuine healing.

A Call for Education

More open discussion and proactive counseling—even before a marriage license is granted—could make a difference, especially for anyone still wrestling with past grief. Reducing the stigma around premarital counseling, especially in America, would give couples space to talk about lingering sadness, tackle potential red flags, and step into the relationship from a healthier place. It's not about policing love; it's about acknowledging that loss and heartbreak need attention so both partners can build a foundation strong enough to weather life's storms.



Action Question

What would it look like if workplaces, community groups, or places of worship offered accessible counseling to couples before they tie the knot?

And how can women, in particular, feel empowered to trust their instincts rather than overlook serious issues?

Insight 10

Suicidal Thoughts Amid Unspoken Grief: A Crisis Across Generations

A Silent Emergency

According to our study, **42% of grieving Americans across all generations have grappled with suicidal thoughts tied to their most recent loss.** For Gen Z, that number rises to 55%, making them the most affected group—but by no means the only group.

The data reveals that unspoken grief can lead people of any age toward despair, especially if they feel there is no safe outlet.

Why It Matters

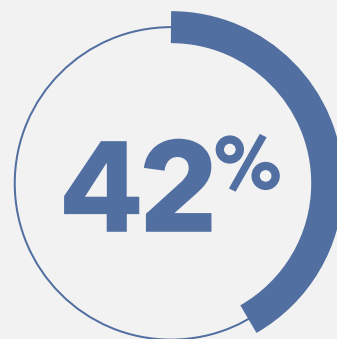
Suicide rates continue to alarm many healthcare providers and communities, and untreated grief is one factor behind that crisis. Older generations may have spent years, if not decades, burying their sorrow, while Gen Z—who often face significant social pressures—are notably high in self-reported struggles. Without meaningful support, every generation risks carrying emotional burdens that can linger, grow, and eventually spill into future relationships or family dynamics.

This underscores the need for resources and dialogue that serve all ages. Whether it's peer groups for retirees coping with a spouse's death or high school counselors trained to address the grief of a teenager, grief at any stage of life deserves attention.

Offering Hope

Conversation is a crucial first step. When people feel recognized and validated in their loss, they're more likely to reach out rather than endure in silence. That could mean creating grief awareness programs across workplaces and schools, encouraging open discussions in churches and community centers, or simply checking in regularly with friends who've experienced a major loss. True healing often involves consistent, empathetic support from people who truly listen.

When communities address grief openly, they begin to combat the lingering stigma and isolation that push so many toward thoughts of self-harm. Together, we can shift from quiet suffering to open understanding, giving every generation a chance at healthier healing.



of grieving Americans across all generations have grappled with suicidal thoughts tied to their most recent loss.



Action Question



How can you foster environments—whether in your workplace, local community, or online—where grief is discussed without judgment, and resources are clearly within reach for those feeling suicidal?

Research Study Conclusion and

Actions to Take Now

We've journeyed through a multitude of data points revealing just how deeply grief runs in our culture. Americans are hurting—often alone—because we live in a place that doesn't talk much about sorrow or the toll it takes. We hush grief, dismiss it as a personal issue, or confuse it with something else (like depression).

The result? A major contributing factor to a mental health crisis that keeps growing.

Why don't we give grief the same urgency we give physical health problems? Maybe it's because many of us learned from an early age to hide our pain. Maybe it's because our media rarely shows authentic grieving. No matter the reason, it's time we dismantle the gag order on grief.

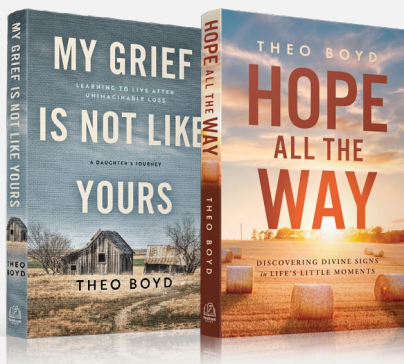
We need workplaces, schools, and faith communities to see grief as a normal part of life—a part we can meet with genuine support, not silent detachment.

What if we started to create communities where you could say, "I'm still sad," and nobody rushed you to move on? Where your friends, coworkers, or even public figures acknowledged that loss is tough and doesn't always resolve itself in a timely fashion? That sort of openness is how we begin healing.

And if we want to protect future generations—our kids, our grandkids—from shouldering that same silence, we must encourage the media to talk about grief in all its forms.

I wrote *My Grief Is Not Like Yours* as a way to break through that silence. My next book, *Hope All The Way*, continues that mission of showing how we can learn, heal, and even find hope after unimaginable loss. We are all in this together; grief doesn't have to be a lonely road.

Let's start sharing our stories, building resources, and reminding each other that sadness isn't shameful, it's human.



Next Steps



1. Stay Connected

Visit ThinkTheo.com to sign up for my newsletter and stay updated on resources, stories, and upcoming events.



2. Spread the Word

Follow me on social media (scan the QR code) and help me encourage open conversations about grief in your own circles.



3. Find Support & Hope

Grab a copy of *My Grief Is Not Like Yours*, and watch for the new release, *Hope All The Way*. By reaching out and learning together, we can turn grief into a bridge that unites us rather than a barrier that keeps us apart.



About The Study's Authors

Meet Theo Boyd

Thelizabeth Boyd was born and raised on a farm in the small town of Whitney, Texas. Her unique name is derived from her grandmothers—Thelma and Elizabeth. In middle school, her classmates nicknamed her Theo. It stuck!

Theo grew up writing poems with her daddy, learned faith through hardship from her momma, and finished college late in life to become a high school English and Creative Writing teacher. She was awarded “Rookie Teacher of the Year” her first year in the classroom, while continuing to write as a guest columnist for several newspapers.

In 2019, a sudden and traumatic loss set the scene for her debut memoir, *My Grief Is Not Like Yours*. It was also the catalyst for her podcast, *Think Theo*, where she discusses complicated grief and the many layers of loss.

Since her book's release in May 2023, Theo has appeared on 13 television programs, 15 podcasts, and 17 radio shows, as well as appearing in 44 publications across the world, including *Newsweek*, *The Sun*, and *The Daily Mail*. *My Grief Is Not Like Yours* has received 15 national book awards, including the Indie Excellence Award for Best Nonfiction in the grief category and two Global Book Awards.

When she's not writing, Theo can be found with her dog, Manly, by her side, walking the fields on the farm, writing her next book, or enjoying an evening out with friends. She and Manly are in the process of building a new home on the farm.

Ways Theo Can Help You or Your Organization



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Think Theo Podcast
on Spotify

Theo loves nothing more than sharing her journey with others. Her passion for grievers comes through not only in her writing but in her speaking, as she shares the most intimate moments from some of the harshest times of her life. With the national research study providing detailed insights into grief, Theo will help to educate others on grief while offering ways to cope and move forward with purpose.

Theo's resilience and tenacity are both compelling and inspiring, while her humor makes the connection authentic and approachable. America needs a voice for grief, and Theo says it needs to be loud. Contact Theo if you need someone to bring comfort, understanding, and community to your organization, as she shares the love and hope that is in her heart.

About The Center for Generational Kinetics

Research | Insights

The Center for Generational Kinetics, LLC (CGK) is the premier thought leadership research firm focused on must-know trends, hidden drivers of change, and actionable insights for visionary leaders. CGK has led more than 150 custom research studies for clients around the world.

CGK's team has worked with over 700 organizations, from healthcare companies to financial services, retailers, technology, and private equity firms and has shared their expertise as keynote speakers and bestselling authors around the world. Learn more about CGK's pioneering thought leadership research at GenHQ.com.

National Research Study Methodology

The research study included a total of 1,000 U.S. participants ages 21 to 65 who have faced a deep grief or loss in the past five years. The study was weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, gender, region, and ethnicity. The margin of error is +/-3.1 percentage points. The research study was conducted online from October 14, 2024 to October 25, 2024.

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