

Introduction

Here are three books that explain the different forms of loss and stages of grief displayed in early life and how they can change and develop throughout adolescence all the way to adulthood.

Each book reflects the variety of experiences we have as humans. They explore themes of loss such as grieving a loved one who has passed, losing a good friendship for many reasons, and losing a relationship and navigating the heartache. Individually, the books show the perspective and raw emotion we feel when going through something as traumatic as loss, and evidently the way we react and feel after the experience. Each one uses similar expression and emotion, yet describes how diversely we respond to bereavement and ambiguous loss.

Roger M. Solomon. EMDR Therapy Treatment for Grief and Mourning. 2024

This book references the development of how young children deal with loss at an early age; for me, this resonates well with the passing of my Grampa when I was 4 years old. This loss demonstrates how grief can extend past the immediate encounter with death, subsuming the loss of a relationship I never had the opportunity to develop fully. Having lost my Grampa at an early age, the experience can be understood through Bowlby's (1969, 1980) theory of attachment and separation anxiety, which implies the loss of an

attachment figure can cause feelings of longing, distress, and the desire to mend the connection.

Although I have only one positive memory of playing a game with my Grampa, its emotional importance shows that limited recollections do not diminish the depth of an attachment. Instead, knowing that love was shared creates a connection to him, even though his role in my life remains largely unexplored. This has created a distinction for me between grieving him and grieving the relationship that would have developed if he were still alive.

I was never told of his death; of course, I noticed he was no longer around, and being that young and not understanding where my Grampa was, complicated the experience. At five years old, I distinctly remember expressing my confusion and grief to my mother one night; it created a feeling of separation without understanding the permanence of him no longer being here. My mother expressed back to me that she also missed him, which did not clear anything up, as the lack of knowledge surrounding death had not yet been explained to me; it left me feeling unresolved.

Only as I grew older and learned a basic understanding of death did I piece together that he was deceased, demonstrating how loss at a young age can acquire a new meaning as you go through life. Bowlby's (1980) concept of reorganisation offers a refreshing framework for understanding this process, as my relationship with my Grampa transformed instead of dissipating; it is sustained through a singular memory and the stories from my mother and Nanna, and their extensive knowledge of this man I hardly remember, yet still feel connected to through them. Consequently, my grief does not come from the death of my Grampa. Still, from recognising what was never possible, this illustrates how bereavement can maintain its meaningfulness throughout all stages of life as I grew to understand death and reshaped how I saw and managed through an early loss.

Thomas Attig. Seeking Wisdom in Death's Shadow. 2025.

The loss of a friendship can cause forms of grief that closely resemble bereavement, despite the person you lost still being alive. Reflecting on the loss of my closest friendship after seven years, I can understand the feeling of loving through the absence of a person rather than through death itself.

Wolfelt argues that grief is a transition from “loving in presence” to “loving in absence”, and I argue that long after a friendship ends, it continues to carry the emotional weight; even when contact is no longer an option. Personally, Wolfelt’s statement resonates with me after I adapted to life without my closest friend, who was a constant source of trust.

Unlike regular bereavement, my friend continues to live beyond our friendship; this creates a unique tension between understanding they are still alive while experiencing the absence. Bowlby’s attachment theory explains this as the loss of an attachment figure can create a sense of longing and emotional distress. This series of reactions that not just death can bring up, but the effect of severing a significant relationship. Nostalgia becomes part of the process, as shared memories and experiences sustain an emotional connection long after the friendship ends. Wolfelt’s theory shows how you can keep loving someone beyond their physical presence; these memories and adornments don’t show an inability to move on; they show that a friendship can be transformed rather than forgotten.

This perspective demonstrates how you can grow an appreciation for the friendship despite it no longer being a reality, and accept that as it is, while not forgetting the memories I cherish. This creates a form of ambiguous loss, as I feel the loss and grief without the finality of death. Consequently, I have to move through life without the friendship I once had while figuring out how to form an identity outside of the relationship. The constant longing for the friendship demonstrates how meaningful attachments continue to influence emotional experiences, supporting the notion that grief can exist outside of death.

I Promise It Won't Always Hurt Like This. Clare Mackintosh. 2026

While this book doesn't directly talk about the ambiguous loss of a romantic relationship, it holds many key points that directly connect to the grief experienced after it ended. In this book, Mackintosh talks about the loss of one twin boy born prematurely, and perfectly describes the waves of grief and sorrow one might experience after an unexpected loss. This resonates well with me, as my relationship ended suddenly due to unfaithfulness, with a large number of questions unanswered, leaving me with little to no clarity.

During the healing of my heartache, I experienced waves of grief that would strike at any seemingly random moment; the thought that anything could trigger an emotional outburst frightened me. Mackintosh writes about this experience by stating that the waves of grief that knock you off your feet will get smaller; at the time, that did not feel like the case, but they eventually began to dwindle and finally ceased to happen at all. This concept allowed me to understand that, while those triggers stopped becoming a daily issue and reminder, they did not take away the fears I had developed after that heartache. Yet those fears did not erase the positive memories I hold from the duration of that relationship.

In the early stages of heartache, it is difficult to gather your thoughts linearly, yet the one consistent thought is of the missing connection. Mackintosh covers this well by saying that this thought will not always be the first thing to mind in the morning. Once these thoughts begin to dissipate, she says that it does not mean you have forgotten, but that the harsh edges of grief are softening. Personally, this matches up well with my experience as I attempted to find clarity through my own thoughts that were battling against my heart.

While actively experiencing heartache and grief of an ambiguous loss, envy is an enemy. Seeing others thriving in their relationships set me back in my healing. Mackintosh found this too as she was finding a path through her own grief; she says that you will not always be winded by someone else's happiness. I align with her views, as I found it very challenging and intricate to be happy for another when I was so

enveloped in my own sadness. Her views on grief harmonise with my own, despite experiencing very different forms of the matter.