



## Conscious Life presents

### Navigating Loss and Grief

**Guest: Dr Patrice Douglas**

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**[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow**

Hello, and welcome to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am delighted to be welcoming back the wonderful Dr Patrice Douglas. Welcome, Patrice.

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

Hi, how are you doing today?

**Jaï Bristow**

I'm great. How are you?

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

I'm good, I'm excited for this conversation.

**Jaï Bristow**

Same. Patrice, you are a licensed psychotherapist and doctor of psychology specializing in mental health for black communities and communities of color. You're also the founder and CEO of Empire Counseling and of The Weight Room, which specifically focuses on black and brown boys and men.

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

Yes.

**Jaï Bristow**

Today we're going to be talking about a really important topic when it comes to trauma, which is that of grief. Do you want to start by telling us a bit about, when does grief appear? What can cause grief?

### **[00:01:04] Dr Patrice Douglas**

Yeah, when we talk about grief, we automatically go to a loved one, a friend, or somebody that has transitioned, or passed away, they're no longer living in the present earth. And grief is just so much more deeper than that that I don't think we often realize that we are dealing with grief on a daily basis.

We talk about grief. I looked up the definition really quick, the definition of grief is deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death. Or if you want to be informal, it's trouble or annoyance. Even though the definition of grief talks about death, death doesn't always have to be a person transitioning from the world. It can be the death of a relationship. It can be the death of an opportunity. It can be a death of an idea of things that you maybe wanted to do or accomplish.

When we talk about grief, we're talking about things that are no longer serving us, or no longer can be a part of our life. I'm pretty sure just even talking about this for the few minutes that I have, that you guys are thinking about friendships that no longer exist, boyfriends, ex girlfriends, marriage partners that no longer serve you.

Maybe thought about going to school and having your dream career, but then school didn't work out, or you got into the profession, and the career that you thought was going to be your dream is no longer your dream. Or opening up a business and the business flopped, or the business couldn't sustain, or you just couldn't get the business.

When we talk about these things, these are great sorrows that we experience when things don't work out. So every single day, we're chucking up more and more things that we're often disappointed about, or things that we don't have attachment to anymore.

There's something to me about it's one thing to lose somebody to death and know that they're never coming back, and there's this emptiness. But there's another thing about not having access to a person anymore, that at any moment you could walk down the street and run into them at the grocery store, or at an event, or scrolling social media and they're live and present.

I think that's one area of grief that we really need to spend more time talking about, because those are things that, the umbrellas that hold anger, depression, sometimes hopelessness, that can turn into suicide ideation.

Grief is very complex when we think about it, but it's something that's occurring every day.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. I'm really grateful for this definition you brought in which englobes so many different types of grief, or so many different types of loss. I'm someone who is disabled, I have a number of chronic health conditions, and coming to terms with my disability involved grieving. Like grieving the life I thought I could have, or the life I was told I could have, or should have. Then realizing that my reality is different, and then I love my life now, but it's still part of a process. And that grieving can happen every day, some days it might look differently than others, but there's different things.

I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to the grief, collective grief that sometimes we feel around global events. At the moment we turn on the news, we go on social media, there's a lot of hate, there's a lot of death, there's a lot of killing, there's a lot of murder, there's a lot of genocide.

There's a lot of really terrible things happening. And honestly, based on the time we're recording this and when this airs, who knows whether it will be the same things, but there will still be terrible things happening.

**[00:04:46]**

I think that that's really difficult, that element of grief where we feel like... Especially if it's not to do with someone we personally know, but a community we feel connected to, or just connecting to the humanness, and the loss of human life.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

Absolutely. It's a really interesting fold of grief, especially when it comes to communities of color. I am from the black community, and the things that we're seeing in the world today, for some of us it's a numbing experience, because we've heard about these things happening in our own community, whether it was death, whether it's back in the slavery era where we weren't considered humans.

It was the goal to remove us from our communities, or wipe out our communities. So to see that play today, some of us are really feeling the anguish, and the disappointment, and fear. And some of us are so numb because we've heard about these stories throughout our legacy, or out of our generations, that even though it feels close to home, we can't connect.

And that's a part of grief, that sometimes we are disconnected from the experience, we're in such a shock, or we've gone through so many different types of trauma that now we feel like nothing phases us, but it's still being stored in the body. I always caution individuals when it comes to stuff like this. Right now what's going on in the world is just not okay.

Right now what was once a place where we can, we call, Death Scroll, and just look at stuff, now we don't even know what's going to pop up on our feeds. The things that I've been seeing on Twitter and Instagram, it almost makes me want to chuck my phone across the room, because I don't want to see those images.

I always caution people to be mindful of what you watch. If you have certain pages that are really about pushing out certain information or images, it's okay to unfollow. You want to check in from their page time to time? Just go ahead and type in their name, but they don't have to come up in your feed, in the algorithm.

Also talk about it. I know that the things that are going on right now, people could be divided, or there's a political agenda. We're very cautious about what we want to say, and what we don't want to say. But the more that we talk about it, and we build that community, we don't feel alone. Because honestly, the stuff that's going on in the world, we feel like we don't have control over it, and we don't.

We can do everything we can to fight for the right cause, and rally up, and try to make a change. But in reality, on an individual level, it feels very helpless. The more that we talk about it, the more that we are mindful of what we watch, the more that we actually process our feelings. We are going through the grief process on a global level, and I think more than ever now, it's important that we start really speaking out how we feel, and leaning on our communities to really support us in those times.

**[00:07:45] Jaï Bristow**

Absolutely. I really appreciate the piece you brought in around numbness, because I think that that's a symptom that often gets overlooked, this idea that actually it can feel very overwhelming, and we can go numb, and that that doesn't make us bad people. It's actually just a symptom of the grief associated with being exposed to so much trauma. Especially when it's something that we do feel connected to.

I'm wondering if you could go into some of the other symptoms of grief, some of the other ways we can recognize the grieving process, especially in relation to trauma.

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

It's really interesting because when I hear somebody, they lost a loved one, or they're going through something. The first thing they say is, I thought I was going to have a meltdown, or a mental breakdown, and it hasn't happened, I don't know if I'm properly grieving.

And the question I always ask, what does a mental breakdown look like? And what does a breakdown look like? Because we have this, and it might be due to entertainment and other factors. But we have this thing about we feel like we're going to fall to the floor, somebody's got to pick us up, we're not eating for days, our eyes can't stop bringing water out of our eye sockets.

I don't say it's a dramatic process, because for some people it does, but that's not what it's going to look like for everybody. I often hear that people feel like they're not grieving because they haven't experienced the physical elements of showing that they're sad. Grief can present in a lot of ways.

It can feel like shock, when you're in shock, what happens? You may not blink, you may not breathe, you may not say anything, your face just looks like this, you may not have anything to say. And because you're in shock, if you're a person that's already on automatic, you're automatically going to the next thing. And people are like, did you just hear what I said? It's like, yeah, I heard what you said, so I guess we need to do A, B, and C. That is a form of shock. It can look like shock.

It can look like trying to stay busy, so you don't have to think about it. It can look like not eating. It can look like not sleeping very well. It can look like humor. It can look like laughter, because you're just trying to find something funny to think about, or funny to talk about. It can look like no tears, it can look like a pail of tears.

It literally depends on how you feel about the situation. I think a lot of times we don't give a lot of time for people to really understand what's going on. Because, for instance, let's say it's the death of a family member. You are notified that your family member has passed, the first thing you gotta do is what? Notify everybody else.

And everybody's like, oh, my gosh, you're okay, I'm going to be there for you, do you need me to come sit with you? Do you need me to come bring you food? So you got all these people in your face, for the next maybe seven to ten days of helping you organize funeral arrangements, or memorial services. They're making sure you eat, they're making sure that you're sleeping. They're making sure you got everything that you need.

**[00:10:54]**

Once, for the black community, once you hit the repast, where you're at the gravesite or the memorial, and you go and you eat, and you have a good time, and you all reminisce, you talk about how you're going to all be there together again, and we shouldn't let time go by. The next day, everybody goes back to work and life sets in. That group of people that loved you, not to say that they didn't, but life has to move forward for them. That's when it really starts. A lot of times, our grief process is delayed, we don't always feel it in the moment, because there's so many things going on. But grief is a lifelong process.

When we really look at grief, we really don't heal from grief, we never remove grief, we never outgrow grief. We grow with grief. Sometimes our grieving process may not start until after everything is said and done, and it's quiet in the house. That's when you realize that life has changed, and I don't know what to do with that change. I don't know what to do when I don't have access to something that I've always had access to, and I can't control the reason why I don't have access to that.

That's when all these things start coming up for us, anger, sadness, withdrawal, not wanting to eat, not really wanting to be around people, feeling like life is not the same, and you're not sure where to go. All of these are symptoms of grief. It's not just tears falling down from your face.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. I'm so glad you brought in that piece about delayed grieving. Because I think that that's something that can be overlooked. It's like, I'm thinking, I don't know why my mind is going to this. But often in TV or films when you see how people receiving the news of the death of a loved one, there can be a lot of judgment on how they react, and that's characters that are written.

But in real life, often there can be a lot of judgment, and that can include self-judgment of how we believe we should react. But each individual is different, there can be a delayed process. Often, if there's a lot going on in life, it can be hard to connect to the emotions, to connect to the feelings, to connect to the grieving process.

And we are in this, okay, I need to get stuff done. If it's a death and we are in charge of the funeral arrangements, for example, and letting the family know.

But I was grieving the loss of a close friend, which, like you said at the beginning, that's a form of grief. The friend didn't die, but our friendship came to an end, it was a friendship that had lasted a long time, it was someone who meant a lot to me.

At the end of that friendship at first I was just like, yeah, I'm fine, whatever it was meant to end, I understand it rationally. Again, that rational brain trying to override the emotional feelings which can happen a lot of the time, I believe.

And then for the first few weeks I really thought I was okay, but I was doing so much, there was a lot of work stuff going on, I was in the middle of moving house, and moving countries. I was dealing, and just juggling, a huge amount of stuff. And then suddenly, a few weeks later when I was settled into my new home, and getting into a routine, and work was easing up, then I got really got in touch with all the feelings.

**[00:14:15]**

I think that this delayed grief reaction can happen very often, and with all these different forms of grief, even taking what's happening in the world and the atrocities, that numbness can sometimes be part of that delayed grieving.

It's that coping strategy, that immediate, I can't deal right now, and at the same time I think that that only can last so long. Often the feelings will eventually come up, I'm wondering if you want to say a little bit about that.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

Yeah, at some point it becomes, I guess you would say, unhealthy or concerning. If you're just moving forward, I think to bring that back, especially for the black community, and I will say for other communities of color, we don't often express emotion in our face, or in a physical form. The black community and other communities of color, they actually show it, somatically.

We may not look sad, we may look like everything's fine, but we have headaches, we have stomach aches, our heart hurts, literally like we're suffering from a heartbreak. We are always taught that we don't really show how we feel because that looks like a form of weakness.

If you ask me a question, I may say I'm fine, but on the inside I'm not fine, but that's my automatic response, because that's all I know how to do is to be resilient and strong. But in reality I'm not doing so well.

There's a time where you start to believe that you're okay, because you keep saying it so much that you become numb. But there are times when the numbness may get you to the moment, because you feel like you have to power through.

There's a time where numbness becomes unhealthy, and that's when you are using things to maintain the numbness. If you find yourself drinking more. A lot of times individuals that are going through grief, whether it's a loss of a life situation or a death, they often find themselves increasing their wine drinking, or their hard alcohol consumption, or they may be using substances like marijuana, and other things to just take their mind out of their grief, or just get through the day.

Also withdrawing from individuals, like you're not hanging out as much, you're hiding from people, you're ghosting, as we would call it. Those are things that we're using as vices to stay in the numbness. That's not okay.

At some point, it's okay to acknowledge that you didn't know what to expect when somebody either left your life voluntarily, involuntarily. But now that you're sitting in it, and it bothers you, you need to address it. I think in society nowadays, we always have to act like we're not bothered, and we are bothered.

You don't know what you know until it happens. I even talk about this with my clients sometimes, about grief, how you don't know what's going to impact you and what's not.

My dog that I had for 15 years, love that little thing. At some point, I had to make a decision because she had canine dementia. I didn't even know that existed, and I gave her meds. I mean, I love that dog to death, but I knew at a point, no matter how many meds I gave her, no matter what

type of highly advanced type of food I gave her, she wasn't going to get better. She was just going to get worse.

**[00:17:32]**

I had to make that decision to go ahead and transition her. When I tell you that was the worst pain I've ever felt in my heart. Unfortunately, at a young age, I was born at a time in my family that I was one of the younger individuals, so a lot of people were older than me, I experienced loss of a loved one at a pretty young age.

I understood what grief was, and I understood how that made me feel, but there was something about my dog that broke my heart. I grieved harder for my dog than I have for some individuals that I know.

That's when you really understand the layers of grief, that you don't know what your heart is going to truly break for, and what it's going to be sad for. There's a complete difference. I say that, to say that we can always guess or imagine what certain situations would look like if we didn't have it. But it's not until we experience it that we know how it really impacts us.

That is the grace that we have to allow for individuals, as well as ourselves, that we don't know what we're going to know until it happens. And when it happens, it may feel like it's something that you can manage, and there's going to be times that it's not. Those are the moments when you just have to be honest with yourself. That is the biggest thing that I can say as a therapist, as a community member, is that you have to be honest with yourself.

You have to be honest about how it impacts you. If you don't want to talk about it. If somebody posts a similar experience, like it's a parent, or a friend, or a dog on their social media, and you're trying to avoid it because you don't want to see somebody else happy with that person, or you don't want to see that image of something.

That right there is telling you that you are really not doing well with the loss that you experience. And it's best to talk about it with somebody, get support for it, journal for it, maybe make traditions where you can still honor whatever you're losing.

But there's telltale signs that your grief is a little bit more complex than you think. And instead of just trying to shake it off, you got to deal with it, and you're going to deal with it for the rest of your days. That is the unfortunate part of grief, is that it could have happened when you're 5, and at 25 something reminds you of it, and you get sad all over again. It's literally something that we grow with, we don't grow out of it.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. There's so many important pieces in what you've just said. I'm really grateful that you brought in the piece about somatics. How some people might not show their emotions overtly, or might not even be aware of the emotions they're feeling, but their emotions will show up somatically. Headaches, stomach aches, heart palpitations.

As a teenager I'd sometimes get boils on my cheeks, which was my emotions literally manifesting on my face in ways when I was so shut down. That's a really important thing for people to recognize, that if we don't feel our emotions, our emotions will find us and will manifest.

## **[00:20:37] Dr Patrice Douglas**

They will find a way to come to the surface whether you want it or not.

## **Jai Bristow**

That might look like physical ailments, that's a really important piece that you brought in. I really appreciate what you were saying about, you can't predict how you're going to feel. You never know how you're going to feel, how you're going to react, how you're going to respond. So bringing in that compassion, that however you are responding, whatever you are feeling, grief is extremely complex. And as you've said multiple times throughout this conversation, there is no one way to grieve.

We all have different processes, and the same person will have a different process depending on what the loss is, and who the loss is with. You'd experience grief in your life from losing people older than you, and your family and stuff, but when your dog died, you didn't respond or react the way you were expecting, and you felt deeper layers of grief almost.

So not having that comparative judgment. I know that sometimes for me, I've cried more about a character dying in a book or a movie, than I have about the loss of real-life people. That doesn't make me a bad person. That just makes the way I function change. It's a lot easier, I think, to feel one's emotions when it's a fictional character than when it's the reality of what's happening, either in the world or one's life.

This is where it's really important to link grieving and trauma. This is the Trauma Super Conference, and the loss of someone or something can be a traumatic event. But also often grief symptoms are trauma responses.

It makes sense that we're not going to grieve in a way that is completely quote-unquote wholesome, or that is by the book. And talking of, by the book, I was wondering if you could talk about the five stages of grief that are so often mentioned. Then we can talk about other ways of grieving that we've already touched upon.

## **Dr Patrice Douglas**

A lot of people refer to the five stages of grief. Sometimes people say, it's four, sometimes people say it's five, I've heard six. These stages are not in order. These are just things that we often experience and deal with. The five are anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. And in no particular order do these happen.

A lot of times we, and I found myself doing this with my dog, I was like, okay, I will give a million dollars, I will get \$500 for you to give me the best medication for me to stop her dementia, stop the issues that she was having. I'm bargaining, I will do anything to keep this person. What can I do to stop this pain? Or what can I do to prolong what I don't want to deal with? We got bargaining.

We got anger. How could you leave me? Why was our time cut short? I wasn't ready to let you go. Why did you have to leave in the manner that you did?



**[00:23:55]**

We also have denial. They're on vacation, they're not here, but they're not gone, gone. They're taking a break, or we're just not seeing each other. It's like that part of, I don't want to say out loud that I'm never going to see them again, or never going to experience this again. It's just not in my face, therefore, I don't have to think about it.

Then you also have depression, where you're just completely low. What does life look like without this experience? What does this life look like without this person? I didn't think about me not having these things in my life, so I don't know what to do about it. So now I just don't know what life looks like. And I'm not a fan of life right now. We have that depression part.

And then we have the acceptance of this situation. This person is not coming back, and while they're not coming back, I am grateful for the time that we spent. I am grateful that I can still have them in my heart, in my mind, and I can carry their legacy on. That's the acceptance.

But let me tell you something about these stages. You could go through them your entire life. You can go through all five for the same situation throughout your whole life.

You can even start with acceptance. Oh, I accept they're gone, they were in pain, I understand. And then three weeks later, you're pissed. Why are they gone? Why am I alone? Why did you do this? Why did this happen? Then you can go back to, well, it was for the best, I understand. Then you're just back to like, I missed them, and I want to eat a pint of Häagen-Dazs, and I want to put my phone on do not disturb.

These are things that you will go throughout in life, because, like we said, in trauma, you have triggers. Grief is triggered often. You don't know if it's going to be a smell, you don't know if it's going to be something you see, you don't know if it's going to be something you heard. You don't know if it's going to be something you remembered out of nowhere, that you constantly go through the cycle.

I'm just saying, not to say that just because you went through all the five doesn't mean that you could close the book, and you'll never go through them again. There's a good chance, and you probably will go through all five, for whatever type of grief situation that you have throughout the course of your lifespan.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. I'm so glad you talked about how it's not a linear process. About how you can rotate in and out of all these different stages, how sometimes maybe you'll skip some of them, how sometimes there's other ones.

I talked in another interview about how as part of my grief recently, I discovered hatred as a stage of grief, which I didn't know about, which felt different to the anger. It was this venomous, I want you to hurt, I want you to suffer as much as you've made me suffer, or as much as I'm suffering. And that was a very natural part of the feeling.

We've talked about how grieving can show up in lots of different forms of losses. Like, a breakup is one of the ones, where you can go in cycles, and you start off fully accepting, maybe you're even

the one who initiated the breakup, or it was a mutual thing, and you know it's right, and you're really happy and like, yes, I accept, it's over, great, all is good.

**[00:27:11]**

And then suddenly there's the denial that comes in later, that suddenly you're like, no, it's not actually over. We were just on a break, let me text them, and that drunk text at four in the morning, when you think all you can remember is how great things were, and then suddenly they don't respond, and you get angry, or you start bargaining with them, please give me another try, please, or whatever it is.

Again, this is a useful framework to understand some of the ways that we can grieve. But it's not a template of, you go through these five stages and tah dah you are free of all grief, and you are miraculously better, and you forget that person ever existed, or that situation, or that life you wanted, or whatever it is. Because again, grief can show up in lots of different forms, and for lots of different things.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

Yeah, there's no certificate of completion, like you pass grief class, you're done. It's not, because you know what happens when you feel like you're done grieving one thing, another thing is going to come up.

If we talk about the different layers of loss in life, there's something to grieve all the time. That's the part where people do get overwhelmed, people do get annoyed, and over it, that there's always something to be sad about, or there's always something to process. That is the part of life that when we came out the womb we didn't know that loss was going to be a big factor of our growing up, and our maturing in this world. Understanding this world is that loss is part of life.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Some people experience more loss than others, that's important to name.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.

### **Jaï Bristow**

It's really important how we've talked about this, and to reiterate again, and again, and again, there is not one way to grieve, each person is unique. I'm someone who's neuro-atypical, and I think that that also means that I experience emotions, and grieve differently. But not all neuro-atypical people will grieve in the same way.

You talked about how often 25 years later, there can be something that reminds us of something, and we're back in one of those stages, or we're back in an emotion, we're back in a grief state, because it is very similar to trauma, where we do all experience loss, and I think we experience grief. And not to feel guilty if you're a few months down the line, or a few days, or a few weeks, whatever, and you're actually feeling really okay, or you've suddenly noticed, oh, I haven't thought about this person in a few days, or a few weeks, or a few months, or however long it's been. That

that's also okay, that there's not one way of doing it, that sometimes it will last a really long time, that some people will be caught in grief cycles, and grief loops, and painful emotions really intensely for a long period of time. Other people will not think about it for months, years, and then suddenly it will be activated, or something like that.

### **[00:30:26]**

I'm wondering if there was anything else you wanted to add on that, on that lack of emotion, or lack of grief. We talked about the delayed thing, we talked about the numbness at the beginning, but that's another way that sometimes there is a lack, and that that's also okay.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

One of the markers that I will say that, if you're not a person that expresses emotion, whether it's through your physical form of crying, or speaking out, one of the things that's a marker, is that if somebody asks you how you're doing, or they're noticing that something's different about you. And when they bring it up, you're like, I don't want to talk about it, everything's fine. You're not processing, because why don't you want to talk about it?

That is a really big part of, a telltale sign that somebody, that's not very forthcoming with their emotions. When they shut it down, if anything sounds like that experience, if anything names that experience, if you're asking anything around that experience and like, I don't want to talk about it's fine, I'm fine. You're not fine.

I say that to say that, people are asking you because they're noticing that you're not okay, and they can't force you to be okay. You can't force yourself to be okay, but that's a telltale sign that you are not in your active grieving process, whatever that looks like, because you're not wanting to talk about it. In order to heal in a place where you can feel like it's a doable adjustment in your life, is that you have to be able to talk about it.

If you can't even go anywhere where people have similar friends, or similar parents that you have lost, or opportunities. Or you find yourself when people are talking about they got a promotion, or they're doing well, and you're not doing well in your career, because you haven't really processed that. And you become angry, or you're projecting the hurt of what you're experiencing onto the world, or to your friends. That is not properly handling your grief.

You can be mad at the world, but you also got to know that you're not really mad at the world. Your grief is what's showing up for you. But a lot of times that can mask in everybody. Those are really good signs for those that lack, or don't express grief in a way where they're talking about it. That when people are bringing it up, and you feel a way about it, or you shut them down, that you do need to take a step back and really ask yourself, what am I feeling? And what's happening?

Because if you don't, there's so many... People can go years without talking about something, but they also cut off a big part of their life. It's not to say that you got to talk about it, and you got to reminisce right away. But if we're talking about six months down the line, a year down the line, sometimes even two years, where you want to shut everything down, you don't want to talk to anybody about any of the things that have occurred.

That means that you are numbing away from your grief, and you're not experiencing it. When I tell you this right now, grief will get as big as it needs to be to get your attention. Sometimes people

have to go through a really bad depression cycle to understand their grief, or something else has to happen that traumatizes them, that brings them back to the forefront of, I have to address this because now something else just came up, and they're both similar. I don't have a choice but to address it.

### **[00:33:39]**

But now you have a bigger ball of grief to deal with. So if somebody asks you and you're just like, get away from me. Just know that that's your grief telling you that you're not addressing it.

### **Jaï Bristow**

100% and I think grief, like trauma, like anxiety, like many of the things we talk about in these conferences, they're big topics, they're complex, and to find freedom, or heal, part of the journey is uncomfortable and requires talking. Having a practitioner or a therapist who can support you on that journey can be really important.

There's one last question I want to ask you on this topic before we end, which is that sometimes guilt can be associated with grief. Especially we can feel survivors' guilt, depending on how the thing ended and the loss. Maybe you want to say a little bit more about the relationship between grief and guilt.

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

Yes. Especially in the black community, and I will say for communities of color, survivors' guilt is a really big area of trauma and grief that we often don't talk about. Pretty much it's an experience of a life threatening situation, or a very serious issue, where you survive and others don't.

That can be those that maybe grew up in a certain neighborhood, and they were able to get the means and the finances to get out of that tough situation. They wanted to bring their friends, they wanted their friends to have the same, or their family, and they weren't able to, either due to environmental factors of gun violence, or whatever. Or they just couldn't move, or end up getting sick and passing away, or they literally just couldn't move. But you had to move on.

I know for a lot of high earners or celebrities in the black community, especially in the entertainment rapping community, they often talk about survivor's guilt, about having to leave their friends and family behind, or their friends didn't live on to be able to see the other side of life. And they feel bad for it because I left them there and they couldn't survive.

I also look at survivor's guilt in a form of employment. Our economy in the States isn't doing very well, inflation is inflating. It's not great. There's a lot of companies that are shutting down, there's a lot of companies that are downsizing. There's something about when a company goes through a layoff and all your coworkers get laid off but you.

You feel guilty that they don't have the income that they once did. You may be a single person, you don't have a family, but your coworkers had kids and a partner. You start feeling bad that you were able to keep your job and they weren't, or even getting a promotion, like you're making more money than them, and you feel like you should be able to support them, or they should be getting the same things that you need.

**[00:36:39]**

Survivors' guilt is a really big area, that it has a lot of different areas that you can feel guilty for because other people didn't get the same experience. Or they weren't able to move forward in the way that you did, or they weren't able to live.

We have hopelessness, we have mood dysregulation, you're depressed all the time, you're angry, you're detaching from people, I don't even know why I'm here and if I deserve to be here. I'd rather just not think I need to be here.

This even goes for secondary vicarious trauma, where we're seeing police unrest and injustices of the black community, and other communities of color. When we look at these things, it's like, that could have been me. That person identifies almost like me, that I could be in their shoes, I feel so bad that I get to live this life and they don't.

A lot of times we have a lot of guilt that comes with loss, and we also have a lot of shame, like we did something wrong because our outcome was this way, and their outcome wasn't. Guilt is a really big part of why grief takes longer too, because you literally have to be convinced that it is not your fault.

It's not your fault that they called you, and you didn't call them back and they died. It's not your fault that this opportunity worked out for you, and it didn't work out for them. It's not your fault that you couldn't save everybody, especially in communities of color. We always want to save someone, and when we can't, we feel like a failure. Guilt often is associated with being a failure, and we don't have control over what happens in life. All we can do is deal with life, what comes at us.

Survivors' guilt is a huge component of grief, but it's also a very big component of how we feel, our value is in the world. It's something that is one of those things that is often a lifelong journey of evolving, healing, and nurturing ourselves, in a way where we can feel wholesome, in a way where we feel like life has meaning. But for a lot of people that is robbed of them.

To be honest when we talk about grief, life is not the same. When we talk about it, people are like, oh, you're going to love again. I probably will love again, I won't love the same. Life and grief does change, and it does change your perspective on things, and it does change your reactions. That's the part where people want to give hope.

But in reality, grief is a changer, it's a game changer. People are going to be different because of that, and that's a part of grace and acceptance that we also have to have for people that experience grief at a very difficult rate.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely, it's really important that you brought that piece in. There's so many examples that could be given, you already gave a few, around work, moving neighborhoods, relating to people, and being, why am I alive and they're not?

Sometimes accidents happen and then some people die, some people survive, people fleeing countries for a better life, either because of war and being refugees, or immigrating to a different country, thinking that they're going to have a better life, and be able to bring their family over and then they can't. People evolving differently, and no longer feeling they can connect to the person

in the same way, and wanting to support them and not being able to. There are so many examples we can give.

**[00:40:20]**

And these feelings of guilt are going to come up, like you say, shame and guilt. Shame can be a very paralyzing emotion, so it's very difficult to process the other feelings because they make you feel stuck in it, and feel like you shouldn't move on, and yet it's okay to move on. I think it's really important to have that acceptance, and that belief it's okay.

I'm wondering if there's anything else you wanted to add around that, around the healing from grief, the moving on. We've talked a little bit about compassion and acceptance, and it's okay, but is there anything else you wanted to add on that?

### **Dr Patrice Douglas**

I just want to say that the grief process of healing does not look the same for everyone. Grief counseling is a very great tool to use, it's not always the same as psychotherapy. It can be a brief model, it can be a group model, it can be an individual where we're solely focusing on the grief. They give you some tools, techniques, some space to talk about it, and then sometimes you do need to progress and go on to personal therapy. I think that's a very great tool that we don't often use.

Also journaling, talking about your emotions. If you're not really able to talk about it in a form of like your mouth, but you do have things to say, or get off your chest, journaling is a very great way.

Writing letters to your loved one is a great tool. Sometimes people want to send them, that's up to you. Or you just want to keep them to yourself. Or sometimes people shred them or burn them, make sure you burn it safely, don't burn your house down, but you can burn them.

Some people even text their loved ones phone number. Some people keep their number past whenever... This is for, I'm talking about as far as death. If you have cut ties with a live situation, it's best not to text them, we want to maintain boundaries. But for those that maybe have transitioned on, some people still text the phone number, or they'll leave voicemails, or sometimes they'll listen to their voicemails of their loved one just to remember their voice.

Sometimes in the grief process, we feel like we can't remember what they look like, or what they sound like. We just want that image, or we want that sound again just to resonate with us, because we can't find it in the sea of grief. So that's a great point.

Talking to your friends about it is a great avenue. I know that sometimes we feel like we're a burden on people by talking about it over and over. There are great people out there that don't mind and understand, and there are some that's like, okay, you got three to five business days. You know who you could talk to and who you can't. Especially when it comes to a breakup or like a friend loss, just pick people wisely who you want to talk to.

One of the biggest things I think helps with grief is creating traditions surrounding them. If the holidays are hard without them, or going to certain places is hard without them, because you're used to it, make traditions where you can still do those things in their honor. Whether you're taking yourself, or you're going with somebody, making that extra dish that they like at the holidays, or

going to a certain concert arena, or going to a certain place that they love, and just reminiscing on the good times. These are things that are still keeping them in your lives, in a place where it's safe enough for you to feel them, but you don't necessarily feel like you don't have them anymore.

**[00:43:53]**

I think the more that we acknowledge that that person isn't in our life, the more our healing can feel like we're making progress, the more we try to act like they're not there, or it doesn't bother us, the longer it sits in us, and that's when it can be detrimental to our mental health.

There's a lot of great resources online. There's a lot of great online support for grief. Know that you're not a burden to people when you're losing something, people understand.

More than ever in this world now, people understand grief on whole different layers, and they're starting to recognize that grief was taught to us as death of a deceased person, but in reality grief is around us, and so more people want to talk about it. Take those resources to your advantage, and don't think that you don't deserve them, or it's not a big deal. If it's not a big deal, then you learn something new, but at least you have that type of support, that's helpful.

**Jaï Bristow**

100%. Thank you so much for bringing in those tools and resources to help with the grieving process. I really want to emphasize the word process. It is a process which we've said all throughout this conversation, looks different for every single person, looks different for different types of loss, looks different in lots of different ways, and that's okay. But there are some things that can really support people in this process.

Patrice, thank you so much for your time today. How can people find out more about you and your work?

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

I have a few websites, you want to check me out [www.patricendouglas.com](http://www.patricendouglas.com), you can also check out my practices. We are multi-state, so check out and see if we're in your state.

We also offer psycho-education groups, that's accessible to anybody that has a laptop. You can go to [empirecounseling.net](http://empirecounseling.net), or you can go to [thebbweightroom.com](http://thebbweightroom.com).

If you want to check me out on social media, these days I'm not so much on Twitter, but Instagram, I'm definitely on there. You can find me on Instagram [@thepatricenicole](https://www.instagram.com/thepatricenicole), or Twitter [@patricendouglas](https://twitter.com/patricendouglas).

**Jaï Bristow**

Amazing. Thank you so much.

**Dr Patrice Douglas**

Thank you.