

THE SECOND HEART



A GUIDE FOR BOOK CLUBS,
GRIEF GROUPS AND BEREAVEMENT PROGRAMS

Bente Forsdal

THESECONDHEART.COM

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This guide is for whoever is leading. A book club host, a bereavement coordinator, a chaplain, a support group facilitator, a librarian. You do not need training in grief to use it. You need to be willing to let a room be quiet.

The Second Heart is built around one question: where does all the love go after someone you love dies? Everything in the book, and everything in this guide, comes back to it.

The book is non-linear. Nobody has to have finished it, and nobody has to have read it in order. That is worth saying out loud at the first meeting, because it removes the most common reason people stay home.

The book opens with a note saying plainly that it is a personal reflection rather than a clinical guide, and that H.E.A.R.T. is a reflective practice rather than a treatment. If you are answering to a committee, that page is the one to show them.

HOW TO RUN IT

Five sessions or one

There are five sessions here, one for each part of the book. Groups that meet once can use the single session on the last page instead. Either works. Nothing is lost by choosing the short version.

An hour, roughly

Ten minutes to arrive and read the passage aloud. Thirty-five on the questions. Ten for the practice if you are using one. Five to close. Running short is better than running over.

Say the ground rules out loud

No advice unless it is asked for. No comparing losses. Anyone can pass on any question. Anyone can cry, leave the room, and come back. Saying this at the start of every session, not just the first, gives people permission they will not ask for.

Read the passage aloud

Each session opens with a short passage from the book. Reading it aloud settles a room faster than a question does, and it gives people who did not read that week a way in.

Let silence run longer than is comfortable

Grief groups fill silence quickly, usually with reassurance. Count to ten before you speak again. The most honest answer in the room is often still arriving.

Choose three questions, not all of them

Each session has more questions than an hour can hold. That is deliberate. Pick the three that suit the people in front of you and leave the rest.

Close the same way every time

End with the closing line rather than a summary. A predictable ending helps people leave a hard conversation without feeling dropped.

ON A MIXED GROUP

The book is non-denominational. Faith language appears, but nothing in it assumes belief, and there is no scripture. A group of any faith or none can use it without anyone being asked to sit through someone else's theology.

It is also not specific to one kind of loss. A group holding a widow, a bereaved daughter, a father and a friend can use the same chapter in the same week. Nobody is left waiting for their chapter.

It says plainly that not every relationship was simple, loving or safe, and makes room for grief that carries anger, relief or unfinished conflict. Nobody in your group has to make a relationship sound better than it was in order to be allowed to grieve it.

It also says that culture, faith, family and community shape how people understand death, and that its own language is one language rather than the only one. Useful if your group holds several traditions.

The book draws on the author's own loss of her father. That is named openly rather than presented as everyone's experience, so a reader whose loss is different is not asked to borrow hers.

IF SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING

Distress in a grief group is not a failure of the group. Someone crying is usually doing the thing they came to do.

What needs attention is different: talk of not wanting to be here, of having a plan, of not being able to keep themselves safe. If that comes up, do not manage it inside the group. Step out with them, stay with them, and help them reach someone who can help now.

Know before the first session who that is in your setting, and have the number written down rather than remembered. The book is company. It is not care, and it does not pretend to be. Its own opening note says so, and asks the reader to seek qualified help if grief is affecting their health or safety.

H.E.A.R.T.

The book is built on five movements, one chapter each, and a sixth chapter on returning to them. They are not stages, they have no correct order, and nothing has to be completed. A group can take one per session, or ignore them entirely. The questions below are the book's own check-in, and they work read aloud in a room.

H Hold what happened

Do I need to acknowledge what happened?

E Express what you carry

Is there something I need to express?

A Allow what you feel

Is there a feeling I am judging?

R Remember with love

Do I need to remember the person beyond the loss?

T Trust life again

Is fear preventing one small step toward life?

The Heart That Still Reaches

Read aloud

The world kept going after your person died. The world continues with such confidence that you begin to wonder whether you are the only person who knows it has changed.

Questions

Choose three. Leave the rest.

- 1 The book says grief is love that still has somewhere to reach and nowhere to land. Does that match what you have felt, or not?
- 2 The author describes standing in the moment before the phone rang. Is there a moment like that for you? You do not have to describe it.
- 3 Where have you found yourself still reaching? A phone, a doorway, a voice in a crowd.
- 4 The world carried on around you. Who noticed that it had not carried on inside you?
- 5 Is there something in your grief you have not said out loud yet? Not what it is. Just whether there is one.

Close with

For a while, love continues along its familiar routes. Toward the phone. Toward the voice. Toward the doorway. Toward the person who was always there before.

What Grief Carries

Read aloud

Grief doesn't always manifest as sadness; sometimes it appears as anger. No one sees that one sentence took twenty minutes.

Questions

Choose three. Leave the rest.

- 1 The book gives a chapter each to anger, to the conversation you keep rewriting, and to relief. Which of the three is hardest to admit to where you live?
- 2 Where do you carry your grief that nobody sees? Work, the supermarket, family dinners.
- 3 What do you say when someone asks how you are? What would you say if you told the truth?
- 4 Has anyone said the wrong thing to you? What would you have wanted them to say instead?
- 5 The book says relief and love can be true at the same moment. Has that been true for you, and was it allowed to be?

Close with

Love doesn't fail because the human body has limits.

Where Love Goes

Read aloud

A shirt isn't only fabric. A handwritten note isn't only ink. A voicemail isn't only sound.

Questions

Choose three. Leave the rest.

- 1 Is there an object, a recording or a message you have kept? You do not have to say what it is.
- 2 The book describes still talking to someone who died, most often in the car. Do you talk to yours? Where?
- 3 What did you learn from them that you now do without thinking? A phrase, a gesture, a way of treating people.
- 4 This is where the title arrives. What do you make of the idea of a second heart that carries love through absence?
- 5 Has anyone ever made you feel that carrying the love was holding you back?

Close with

The second heart carries love through absence.

Learning to Carry Love

Read aloud

H.E.A.R.T. isn't a cure for grief. It isn't a treatment, a timeline, or a sequence you must complete.

Questions

Choose three. Leave the rest.

- 1 Of the five movements, which one is the group drawn to, and which one does it want to skip?
- 2 The book says returning to a movement is not failing. Where have you felt you were going backward when you were not?
- 3 Hold, express, allow, remember, trust. Which is hardest for you right now, and has that changed since the loss?
- 4 Is there a sentence you never got to say? You do not have to say it here.
- 5 The book says a feeling is not an instruction. Which of your feelings has been giving you orders?

Close with

You will return to it whenever your own heart needs somewhere gentle to stand.

The Life Love Builds

Read aloud

Ordinary love rarely announces itself while it is happening. The ordinary becomes visible because the person is no longer there to repeat it.

Questions

Choose three. Leave the rest.

- 1 What ordinary thing do you miss most? Not the big occasions. The small repeated one.
- 2 Has laughter come back? What did you feel about it when it did?
- 3 The book says you can wish the loss had never happened and still hear ordinary love differently because it did. Can both be true for you?
- 4 What do you do differently for other people because they existed?
- 5 If someone asked you where the love goes, what would you answer now?

Close with

The love you thought you lost becomes the love you give.

IF YOU ONLY MEET ONCE

Groups that meet once, or that hand the book out and gather a single time, can use this in place of the five sessions. It runs comfortably in an hour.

Open

Read aloud: Grief exists because love exists.

Round one

Each person says the name of the person they lost, and one ordinary thing about them. Not the illness, not the death. Something ordinary. Nobody responds. You go round once.

The book

Read the five movements of H.E.A.R.T. aloud: hold what happened, express what you carry, allow what you feel, remember with love, trust life again. Ask which of the five is hardest right now.

The question

Where does all the love go? Let it be a long silence. Then whoever wants to answer, answers.

Round two

One thing each person is taking away. One sentence, no discussion.

Close

Read aloud: The first heart loved them through presence. The second heart carries that love through absence.

WHEN THE ROOM HAS NOTHING LEFT

Some sessions run out of words before they run out of time. The book has a practice for exactly that, and it works with a group sitting in silence. Read it slowly, with a pause at each line.

On those days, reduce H.E.A.R.T. to one breath.

Breathe in without forcing the breath to become deep.

I am here.

Breathe out.

This is hard.

That is enough.

ABOUT THE BOOK

AUTHOR	Bente Forsdal
SUBTITLE	Where Love Goes After Someone Dies
STRUCTURE	Five parts, thirty-one short chapters, an introduction and a closing
ALSO INSIDE	H.E.A.R.T., a five movement reflective framework, with a chapter for each movement, one on returning to them, and five simple practices
GROUNDING	A notes and sources section citing published bereavement research, alongside an opening note that the book is reflection rather than clinical guidance
FAITH	Non-denominational. No scripture, and nothing that assumes belief
WRITTEN FOR	Anyone who has lost someone they love
ISBN	978-1-967267-05-7

I WILL JOIN YOUR GROUP

Book clubs, grief groups and bereavement programs can have me on the call to talk about the book and answer whatever comes up. By video, anywhere. There is no fee for this.

A free sample copy is available for whoever is choosing the book, with no obligation and no follow-up unless you want one. Bulk copies for twenty-five or more are invoiced directly.

Write to hello@thesecondheart.com and say who you are, your organisation, and roughly how many people you work with. That is enough. A reply will come from me, not from an assistant or an autoresponder.

With love,

Bente Forsdal

thesecondheart.com

The Second Heart is a companion, not a substitute for professional support, and it is written to sit alongside whatever care your group already provides.

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