

Episode #222

A Full Spectrum Life

Jess Goyder

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[00:00:00] **Susan:** today I am delighted to be joined by Jess Goyder on Life Beyond the Numbers. Jess, you are so welcome.

[00:00:09] **Jess:** Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[00:00:11] **Susan:** And Jess and I met by accident, you could say. So it was at the Oxford Indie book Fair during November of 2025, and we struck up a conversation and I was fascinated by what Jess does, and that's why you're here.

[00:00:28] **Jess:** Thank you. Yeah. I'm fascinated to be here too.

[00:00:32] **Susan:** Jess, I suppose the first thing I thought about and you work in the, in grief, and I know that's a really small way of describing it, and hopefully we can unpack it a little bit more, but what I've been thinking about is how do you, when you come across somebody or meet somebody, see grief in someone.

[00:00:56] **Jess:** It's a good question. I think one answer is that everybody is grieving. There's nobody who escapes loss. it's built into the operating system of life on planet earth. it's just the way things are. We are not taught what to do when we lose things. we are taught how to accumulate things.

We celebrate all our wins and our gains, but the other aspect of life is not something we're ever equipped for. But it's inevitable once we start to know what grief is, we understand that, oh, it's part of my everyday experience, as well as those acute, huge events like a major bereavement any other change that you might have to go through.

[00:01:34] **Susan:** Because I think people just associate grief with death.

Bereavement, yeah. And you use that word loss, which is so much bigger than the loss of another human's life because we all go through losses day to day, year on year. So why have we put grief and death together?



[00:01:59] **Jess:** let's go back again and I'll define grief in a way that makes sense to everybody first, and then we can think about why grief has been so shoved to the sidelines with such a narrow definition in a sense, although that's what most people might see me about because it's the most intense.

But grief is simply the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior. So this definition comes from the Grief Recovery Handbook, which informs most of my work. It's linked to the grief recovery method. so I'm gonna say that again.

Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by an end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior. So it's not only sadness, grief is an only sadness. Grief is everything. Grief is the gratitude, the joy, the guilt, the numbness, the anxiety, the relief, and you'll probably be swayed between all of those feelings. Maybe in the space of five minutes, there are no stages.

And then if it's so ordinary, it's a change in a familiar pattern of behavior. it's oh, that dry cleaners I walk past every day has shut. oh, okay. We're moving buildings now. Oh, okay. I've got a new manager. We're changing the protocol. We're doing everything a different way. I'm using work examples more now, but it's simply change. But also, it could be huge. it's often linked to relationship, so even a relationship, nobody's died, but you never had the relationship with a parent that you really needed. There will be loss and grief there, and it might be so much more complicated than the grief of somebody you really love dying.

So grief is so ordinary, but it's a, it is a big word. loss is less loaded, and yet it's all cumulative. So these tiny losses from the very moment we are born, which is a huge change, a huge loss, we spend the rest of our lives recovering very, probably from that moment on, you lose your blankie. You don't get the part in a School play. You fail an exam and nobody teaches us what to do.

In fact, we are misinformed. The education we get is actually quite dangerous and damaging. and it's as if we're walking around with big backpacks, it is every loss is like a pebble and we don't know what to do. We put it in the backpack. Then you might get a boulderer and they accumulate. Every single loss you experience will be impacted by the unresolved losses that went before it.

[00:04:29] **Susan:** And then it is quite often, the straw that breaks the camel's back, so

[00:04:34] **Jess:** Absolutely. Yeah. So if you've ever had a reaction that didn't make sense, why am I so upset about losing that shirt? It's not just the shirt, it's everything else.



[00:04:46] **Susan:** And as you were talking, I was thinking about schools and medals for participation that, that's, we show everyone, it's great to show up and take part, but there are always winners and losers or the failure of an exam or whatever, and it's you just have to study harder and you just have to do this, but there is no room for, I guess it's words like tenderness, compassion, understanding, that are somehow sidelined as well.

[00:05:18] **Jess:** It is all sidelined, I think, because we have a shame over what we might see as negative emotions and we, I mean, I still carry it for all my years of training. It's just so deeply. Part of us. so I think that's a huge part of it. We're all taught to not feel bad. even if you've ever cried and just found yourself saying sorry for crying, I think that's a big part of it. And we've got huge historical reasons why grief has been avoided. In other cultures, it's not avoided so much, and historically it's certainly not so avoided. Historically, death was all around us. People died at home. We killed our animals. We understood the cycle of life.

[00:05:58] **Susan:** And we are very fixated on longevity and defying the odds. And is that part of it then, Jess? This. S like furthering ourselves from grief.

[00:06:09] **Jess:** Utterly, utterly. And there's a historical context. If you think through to say probably our parents' generation or you think about the war generation, we actually, this whole, the whole previous century we had the first World War. We had a global pandemic where actually millions of mostly young men died in that Spanish flu. Then we had the Second World War, and it was so much, we even had, the Great Depression in that time. We had so much loss.

And we also had the rise of modernity as we know it. So medicine became this great savior, like medicine could fix anything, capitalism could solve everything. Money could solve everything. You could buy your way out of anything. We had progress and we had amazing projects. in, in the UK we had the NHS, we had so many developments.

And yet actually there was this moving away from ritual understanding. In fact, grief and loss was something that got lost in that, and I think it's even stronger now with this sort of, in this AI world, we think we can optimize anything, everything can be maximized, optimized, everything can happen instantly. So we do not understand limits, and that's really what grief teaches us. Ultimately, it teaches us the reality of life on planet earth.

[00:07:29] **Susan:** Yeah, there's a grounding to it. There's a, there's a humanity. that's what I'm hearing and what you're saying. The humanity is being stripped outta so much of what us as humans do on a day-to-day basis. Then things like grief that are so fundamental to who we are, are just being canceled for the kind of terminology

[00:07:56] **Jess:** I think that we can be, and there's a lot of nuance here because that technology has made us connect in ways we wouldn't have thought possible. the way our family might connect on WhatsApp after a death and share memories and, it's the



anniversary of a death today if somebody I loved and the way the family has gathered together has been really strong and powerful, but I think we are isolated too. We are physically isolated in many ways that we could have never imagined. We live in this very separate self psychology. so yeah, I think it's very nuanced, but I think we are very isolated, certainly in a community sense, and certainly in a sense of ritual.

Historically, rituals would help us with beginnings and endings and even religion served a purpose, for all its oppression it was a chance and opportunity for a community to gather and share in ritual practice, which we have less opportunity for.

[00:08:51] **Susan:** And as, as you're speaking, I'm also thinking about Ireland and funerals because as rituals go. There's still a huge community ritual to a funeral there. And when someone dies, they will be laid out either at home or in a funeral home, and everyone will gather to pay their respects. And when you are grieving the loss of a loved one, there is huge support.

And it's almost like you are held by your community as you go through this and. I'm from a small town as well, and so everyone knows everyone, but I also think it helps massively in the grieving process because you never feel alone.

[00:09:37] **Jess:** Absolutely when I think of people who decide not to have funerals, they see, the funeral isn't about you. It's about everyone you love. It's actually a chance for them. They might need a funeral. They might want a funeral.

[00:09:52] **Susan:** And it's actually the same in workplaces. I've had people who've left workplaces who've been very popular, for want of a better word, liked, respected, and don't want to have a leaving do. And I've often said to people, it's not about you. It's actually about all of us that want to show you what you meant to us while you were here.

[00:10:13] **Jess:** Exactly. See, there's two keys to this. It's relational. It's about relationship. we don't only grieve people. We can grieve things. We can leave anything that has changed anything that we've lost a job, a whole identity. We need to understand how relational it is, and we need to understand that it marking beginnings and endings and those feelings around that. And making room for all the feelings we may have, however conflicting they may be is super important.

[00:10:42] **Susan:** And the conflicting is interesting, isn't it? Because we are never really feeling one thing anyway. We're always feeling a whole host of different things, yet we're not tuning in often to what we are feeling. And then grief is overpowering in comparison to a lot of other emotions, I think. So you feel then that's the only thing almost you're feeling.



[00:11:08] **Jess:** Yeah, I think remembering grief is many emotions, but it is so intense. It produces such a huge amount of emotional energy and in a world we think we can control. It's a moment where, you are grief. It's not as usually it ricochets through you. It comes in waves. It has its own cycle and pattern, and that can, especially if you're in a working environment that can really knock your confidence, knock your, you might lose everything that made you who you are at work. You might not be able to concentrate, not be able to think straight, not be able to function or perform in the way you want to. And that is another loss in itself. It's a whole loss of identity too.

[00:11:46] **Susan:** Yeah, and that's a big one. The loss of identity for people in so many parts of life. 'cause life is full of transitions, isn't it? So we are carrying grief through each of those changes. And you mentioned at the beginning that people more regularly come to you because of death. So how do we recognize grief in ourselves and that we might need help with it beyond bereavements, for example.

[00:12:20] **Jess:** That's a very good question. I think once we understand that it's natural and normal, we can normalize it. It's a natural and normal part of life, so we can allow and validate the feelings that are there very much the way you'd want a best friend to do it for you. You can start to do that for yourself, but grief often shows up in ways you might not expect. It might be when you are massively over-functioning, when you're just, you won't stop. Many high performers are actually dealing with unprocessed grief. That's how they got there. They function brilliantly. If they never stop, they never have to actually sit and be with whatever feeling it is or set of feelings that just feel too hard to process.

sometimes people feel really flat and shut down. That's a bit of an example of the flat line, and our culture can encourage that. It's just keep busy, keep distracted, keep distracting yourself, and to a certain degree, distraction is essential. You can't be with your pain all the time. The whole point is you'll want to oscillate between distracted forward thinking moments to moments when you are doing the grief work, when you're feeling the sadness and recognizing what's there and all the emotions that are there, and it can show up in us in physical illnesses.

It's often held in the body. Shown in the body. It will show up in any feelings that you have in many ways because our feelings are often a response to change. Like you say, our feelings are simply data. They're simply information feelings are the essential part of how we get through life and respond to life and adapt to life.

They're vital. So the more we just allow, we, we just need to keep them moving. That's the point. I.

[00:13:59] **Susan:** And give them. and discern between the ones that need the attention and the ones that are brought about by being overwhelmed with something that we don't probably need to give our attention to.



[00:14:11] **Jess:** yes, but we can give our attention to all of them. But it's, it is just in ways that huge, that to be very simple and pragmatic. just even literally naming the feelings and writing them down. I feel can even use a feelings wheel. Writing down the feelings really helps.

Exercising, really helps. Maybe seeing this feeling as maybe a part of you. it might be your 12-year-old self. That's really furious right now because actually what just happened echoes something that happened to a 12-year-old you much more the sort of 51-year-old you, whatever it is. so you can just almost recognize that part of yourself.

Say, oh, I feel and validate it. Listen to it. Maybe that feeling has a message for you. moving really helps. Being physical really helps that you, everyone will have their outlets, whether it's creativity, movement. Something else, but avoiding the less healthy ways of suppressing our emotions that have become so culturally Okay. Is also worth noting too.

[00:15:08] **Susan:** Yeah. And the word that came up as you were talking about that is numbing.

[00:15:13] **Jess:** So I think there's a, and then the link to addiction, because I'm sure that addiction for a lot of people is a way of managing pain.

Absolutely. We talk a lot about coping, and to be honest, I hate the word coping. I don't think you want to cope. I don't think you can cope with grief. How can you cope with something as devastating as the death of somebody you're not meant to? You are meant to fall apart. That might just be okay and maybe you can't fall apart in a meeting. Maybe you can't fall apart at certain moments, but you need to let yourself do it.

That the more you are held, the more you have containers. I use this word containers a lot. It's my obsession really. But grief really needs containers, and by that spaces, people. Places where you can bring the reality of what you actually feel, where you can explore how you feel, discover how you feel in a way you maybe hadn't even been able to.

And yes, the consequences of suppressing our grief from drinking too much. Overworking. We all have our ways, they're all necessary in many ways. It might be shopping, might be alcohol, might be just keeping incredibly busy, might be functioning at a super high level, might be being an obsessive planner.

They're all fine, but they can be more devastating than the grief itself if they're taken to extremes. there's this really gentle nuance here, and it's just developing that self-awareness.

[00:16:39] **Susan:** And



self-awareness is still hard, I think for people. For any of us. I'm not talking about others. I'm including myself to really see what might underpin some of our habits because they become so habitual that they seem normal. I'm like, of course it helps to talk to somebody, but I guess how would you know that you need a bigger container or you need someone to help you contain as opposed to just what the word you used? Coping. Because so many people go through life coping with everything What would make someone reach out other than collapse?

[00:17:29] **Jess:** I think somebody likened the work I do to being a bit like a dentist. everyone could do with a checkup, but people only contact their dentist when they're in the most devastating pain and their tooth's fallen out. I need help now. but I think. My honest answer is that this is something everybody needs to do and can do.

the grief recovery method that I use is preventative in many ways too. That, the best possible thing you can do for other people is to do your own grief work if you in any way you want to support others, if you work with others, addressing and feeling more complete about your losses is probably one of the greatest gifts you can give anybody, least of all yourself.

So I think first of all, things don't have to be extreme for you to get help. I think if you really notice that your life simply isn't as fulfilling as you'd like it to be. If things feel flat or suppressed or if it's too painful, that's another angle, because I think.

I say this as somebody who is a counselor for a bereavement charity, so I know the benefits of counseling and talking therapies. I do that, but I also feel the grief recovery method takes you through actual action steps because time doesn't heal, and I don't always think only talking is enough.

I think it's actually the actions of something called completion where you actually reach a feeling of completion when it comes to a certain human relationship. You feel complete about that relationship. It's not as if in 20 years time you might not still be devastated or in floods of tears, one moment because of somebody you loved who's no longer here.

That's logical. that. grief will never leave. But the whole point is that your life also has joy in it. It has purpose, it has meaning and my like. I often say my life is full of grief as I hope it would be 'cause my life is full of love. It's also full of all sorts of things. It's full of a spectrum and it's all recognized and validated, and I have so much more energy because of how I'm able to understand that grief is part of the picture and I have the capacity for all of it.

So it's about growing our capacity to feel, growing, our capacity to hold. it's really like building muscle, working with muscles, It's like training. It's training for life.



[00:19:50] **Susan:** as you're talking, I'm thinking about black and white versus technicolor. there's something about seeing the beauty of life everywhere that isn't possible, when we have suppressed so much and we're almost protecting that and keeping ourselves small and closed and missing out.

[00:20:09] **Jess:** That's right and there's no right or wrong way to do things either, nobody's saying. You have to feel it all, all at once. Nobody's saying you have to go to that place. That feels too scary if there's some part of you stopping you going there, there's probably a reason it's okay. you don't have to force anything.

It's about doing what feels truthful. And I think most of all it's about the self-compassion or inner compassion, because it's very hard to grow in any direction without that inner compassion. And I know that takes time. It's easily said, it's thrown around. We don't really know what it means. It's a work in progress for all of us, but the more compassionate we are to ourselves, the more okay it is to be ourselves. The easier it is to work with any of this or the easier it is to seek help.

[00:20:55] **Susan:** You talked about high performers or people that throw themselves into work, and I noticed that from your website, that you often started a talk, for example, with if you're here, you're a leader. This is leadership training and we've talked a little bit touched in and outta the workplace, but how does this show up in leadership?

Jess?

[00:21:19] **Jess:** Okay. So there's two really good, two fun things to explore here. There's how grief shows up specifically for leadership, which is very true. There's also how all grief work is leadership work, which is where it comes together. Yeah.

But let's jump on the first one, which is, Top performers. I know this because I am, I was, I've performed at 10 Glastonbury's. I was a very driven person. I coached at all these companies. I know that part of my drive, not all of it, a lot of that drive was totally healthy and fabulous, but part of that drive that would never be satisfied was the part of me that was grieving and didn't know.

I thought if I can become this, I will be okay. Everything will be okay. and I was just, I was constantly running towards the next achievement in a sense. So I think many driven people ultimately do have unresolved grief at their core. That's the first thing. It takes something to take yourself into that position.

But I also think that being in a leadership role is incredibly isolating. I think you lose your peers. I think you have to make decisions that aren't actually yours, but they're the brunt. Now you are the face of an organization and maybe you haven't even had to choose the



layoffs that took place, and yet, though, that wasn't your decision. But you are the face of it and you have to carry that emotional weight and that the moral injury of making choices that actually you wholeheartedly, at your core, nowhere wrong. there's a lot of time poverty. There's, intense stress and pressure. There's just no, no time for reflection. you are often performing competence when you might not be feeling it. There's this disconnect between the human being you're feeling and the person you are acting. And there might be even be the loss of who you used to be. Like, all the versions of yourself you used to be before you were in this leadership role that maybe you've had to let go of. And carrying that responsibility can be very lonely. So I think there's so much I could go on and on about the loneliness of leadership and the pressures that leaders are under, but that's a taster.

So when I work with people, that's what I see.

[00:23:25] **Susan:** and it makes so much sense, and I can relate it back to periods of my own career in senior management teams. And I think what's interesting is it's not just the CEO,

[00:23:36] **Jess:** Yeah.

[00:23:37] **Susan:** you do have a leadership team, there'll be somebody, For every decision that's made, who's going to grieve a part of that, or feel responsible or feel isolated. And I think it goes through the fabric of a senior management team. And so it's not usually the one person that's carrying

[00:23:57] **Jess:** No, it's true and unresolved grief bleeds through the structure of an organization. And if an organization doesn't have the literacy, doesn't have the language, it doesn't have the understanding of what grief is, it actually fractures the core of that organization. It becomes brittle, it stops functioning.

Relationships break down. You can start to see it. The whole fabric of the organization and that's where we really want to encourage people at work to do their grief work. It sounds like an extra, but actually it's not an add-on. It's actually fundamental to the structure of everything.

[00:24:31] **Susan:** And it's reminding me of this book I have here and this, this person I really like who is, a guy called Nicholas Jani and his book is called Leader as Healer.

[00:24:41] **Jess:** Oh, fantastic. Okay.

[00:24:43] **Susan:** and it is about, tackling grief and I don't know if grief is so explicitly mentioned, more to the point of the fractures perhaps that you're talking about and just people not being self-aware or numbing themselves to things that suppression that we've spoken about, because I don't think, okay, my. Organizational life is limited to the



organizations I've been in and the organizations I work with now, but I've never heard anyone talk about grief at work.

[00:25:18] **Jess:** it's seen as a disruption, so it's seen as, oh, it's treated as sickness. This is the biggest problem. It's pathologized, so it's put in the sick pay bucket. Oh, something bad has happened to you. people are still almost treated as if it's carelessness, So sorry for your loss. You've lost your loved one. it's, yes, and this is the change if we can start to see grief as far more than a disruption. It's an opportunity, and that sounds cheesy, but no Understanding loss at work and how it shows up at work is a tremendous opportunity. And once we understand that all grief work is leadership work, once we look at that, then we can see what an opportunity it actually is, and we can contrast that to the devastating costs of not recognizing grief at work.

Because the biggest cost is presenteeism. if we wanna talk figures, the lowest figures we have are 16 billion pounds a year. is what presenteeism related to bereavement alone costs the UK economy each year. Those figures are from before the pandemic. Bereavement alone. we're talking vast costs from the over 50% of people who were surveyed in major studies by Marie Curie and Sue Ryder reported that, months after a bereavement or death, they were still.

Their performance was still hugely impacted at work. So there are huge financial reasons to look at this. it makes sense in numbers as you'd like to say, that beyond the numbers, this is about our humanity and the opportunity that work actually presents.

[00:26:49] **Susan:** And presenteeism is one thing, but also engagement or disengagement at work and a lot of those dis words that we would have, I think even the ability to disagree. Agree with somebody healthily. if I'm not feeling myself, I'm gonna close myself off probably to things that are happening and being able to relate fully human to human.

[00:27:13] **Jess:** that's right. What you've just said, Susan, is really reminding me how one of the greatest opportunities in grief and understanding grief properly, or being complete with grief, is that we start to have a much healthier relationship with the truth. And if anything is gonna help an organization, it's that. Can we create the conditions where people feel, I don't wanna say safe, it sounds too small and an objective, but where people feel comfortable to explore the truth, to not only express the truth, but explore the truth. To be with the truth, to relate to the truth, we have to meet reality where it is.

If we can do that, then we might stand some chance of success. If we're all cut off from ourselves, we're all cut off from our emotional reality, from the reality of our finite nature of time on planet earth. The reality of limits, the reality of what we are responsible for and what we're not actually responsible for. We can meet that truth. what is possible at work for us? What's possible in our lives?



[00:28:22] **Susan:** I love it. And it also scares me because it sounds so foundational and as you're talking, I'm thinking this isn't just organizations, Jess, this is like counties, societies, institutions globally. if we look at the state of the world.

[00:28:41] **Jess:** I know.

[00:28:42] **Susan:** one of the worst. My dad is 80 and he says that the world is the worst now that he's ever seen it.

And there's a grief in that.

[00:28:53] **Jess:** We have so much to grieve and we have so much in the Western world. This is what's so bizarre. We have, comfort that the kings and queens of a few hundred years ago could only ever dream of. And we do have a lot. We also have immense poverty of the spirit in other ways. And we have to think globally.

You have to think, how other cultures respond. But yes, I think I went all tingly when you talked about how big this was because it is. It is. and when you're talking about work, we can make our workplaces actually matter. They might not, but if they want to last, and it's about time organizations stepped up. To actually supporting humanity, and there's, that doesn't have to contradict capitalism. Actually. The two can go together,

[00:29:38] **Susan:** And they do because every organization is made up of people and money. First and foremost. They are the basics, and we are so much better at being stewards over the money than we are being stewards over the people.

[00:29:51] **Jess:** That's right. That's right. And we, and we can't have one without the other ultimately.

[00:29:56] **Susan:** we definitely can't. And automation isn't going to solve it either.

So the word that come keeps coming up for me now as we're talking Jess, is trauma. So there's been a lot about trauma, sensitive approaches to work, trauma in the workplace. are grief and trauma hand in hand? Are they both sides of the one coin? How do they interrelate?

[00:30:24] **Jess:** That's a really good question, and I think one really helpful way of looking at it is that if we go back to the definition, grief is the conflicting feelings caused by an end of all change. In a familiar pattern of behavior. All trauma involves grief. Not all grief will involve trauma, but all trauma will involve grief.



All trauma will involve a rupture. It will involve life being one way and then not another. much of trauma might involve a violation or a shock or a new reality. You have to come to terms with. So I think they're very intertwined, very closely intertwined, and the very, very worst trauma is relational. So a community could, maybe you've got evidence of this, communities that go through huge floods, entire houses wiped out what people remember. there's very little trauma recorded in communities where people say, it was amazing. Everyone gathered together. I was looked after, I'm, oh, it was a, my neighbor came round.

this happened. there's so much less trauma than the same circumstances, and a house wasn't replaced. We didn't get the help we needed. My insurance company completely let me down. We were totally isolated. We abandoned by the emergency services. So it's always the relational human aspect that has the deepest impact on whatever grief or trauma may be involved after a supposedly traumatic event.

And of course, like trauma, grief is totally individual. So I talked about the backpacks. We all carry, everyone's backpack is unique and everyone's relationship is unique. somebody will have one relationship with a sister that will be completely different from a siblings as so it's understanding how unique this is.

So I think a lot of trauma training is very helpful. Perhaps we could do the same for grief and bring it into the mix.

[00:32:15] **Susan:** Yeah, because it seems like the missing piece at the moment. I didn't even know that grief work was done within organizations. And a lot of what happens in organizations is about change.

[00:32:30] **Jess:** Yes.

[00:32:31] **Susan:** It is about change, and whether that's being asked to move seats to, change in leadership, whatever, it's constant and there's always losses to be mourned at work and yet there's no space for that.

[00:32:48] **Jess:** Absolutely. and the irony is that sometimes it only takes five minutes once you have the understanding. Which can happen in a short to, one hour or ideally two and a half hour workshop. Once you have the understanding, everyone in the organization is on the same page. People do know what to say and what not to say.

As soon as you have an understanding, things shift. That's the first thing. As soon as people start to do their own grief work, things shift and then actually. It doesn't need to take up a lot. it might be that just you and I've got wonderful examples of people at work.



I, I've researched executive assistants a huge amount. For some reason I've really resonated with that community and what the people in those roles carry especially and the, executive assistants have such an understanding of every level of an organization.

So I heard one ea talking about how I've written about this recently, how she just. she lost, he's had many losses and a parent died recently. And how she would just find five minutes in the lift and that five minutes in the lift once she knew what to do would make all the difference and she'd go off and function brilliantly.

But it's, it's just knowing what to do. I'm just saying it doesn't have to be complicated. It doesn't have to be a big deal. It's not a huge deal. It's just a very loaded word for good reasons.

[00:34:01] **Susan:** Yeah. And which brings me to my next question really, which is about people don't know how to support grief. I think they're going to say the wrong thing or that they need to say something profound to somebody. and of course the road to hell is paved with good intentions as well, so it can go wrong. But surely there's something in our shared humanity that means often it's just being in the presence of someone else.

[00:34:32] **Jess:** I think what you've said is key, and actually I think at work we don't have many opportunities just to be present with each other because our work is so much more about doing than being, and grief is a question of the heart and is answering with the heart. This is the problem at work because we are not expected, if anything, the heart is shunned.

It's hang on, this is emotional. Let's put this in. You know more about this than I do. Let's put that in the emotional box. That's something we accommodate when we have to, we make allowances for, because we happen to be working with human beings here and we have to make allowances for that fact.

but no, so like you said, being present with somebody, I think so I'll bring it right back to doing your grief work. 'cause the more you are complete in yourself, the better able you are to be with others who are grieving. People will intuitively feel, they don't have to second guess themselves, check themselves over, explain.

They'll sense that you get something. That's the first thing. And then I could go into what's helpful and what's not helpful. But like you said, being with somebody as they actually are makes all the difference with grief.

[00:35:41] **Susan:** and What often stops people, I think in many situations, whether it's we label it hard or difficult is that feeling of, that internal butterflies you might get or sweaty ponds or something. But there's a fear response often when we don't know how to act and then we want to shut that down so we close up and we are not present.



I always think there's a difference between feeling uncomfortable and feeling unsafe, and we have to tune into that as well and trust that our humanity is enough.

[00:36:19] **Jess:** Yeah, I think so. I think the most important thing is to say or do something and say, and do it quickly. Even if it's just, I dunno what to say, I dunno what to say. even just say, I dunno what to say, I'm just so incredibly sorry this has happened. I can only begin to imagine, I remember before I would say I can't imagine, but actually somebody I was working with said, actually, I'd really like you to try. So from now on I say I can begin to imagine, I can, 'cause I and I do that. I begin to imagine what that person is going through. I begin and I tell them that. And I think just allowing somebody to be how they are, recognizing the individuality of that, which is where grief support can be challenging in an organization which maybe needs a policy.

You're dealing with the individuality of human beings and the uniqueness of human beings where grief support is the litmus test of company culture. As I say, frequently, it shows everything. It doesn't matter what your policy is. If your policy says, take all the time off you need, but the culture says, oh, we all come back straight away we'd never dream of taking more than a day off. That's the litmus test.

[00:37:31] **Susan:** And there's something about acknowledging it as well. I think, Jess, that's important because if you've suffered a loss in your own life and you come to work and no one acknowledges the fact that you've been out. Because they're afraid of what to say. That must be very isolating too.

[00:37:54] **Jess:** Grief is always isolating because grief is always so unique. That's where we need community and support and love so much. And yet ultimately you are the only person who will be feeling the way you do. so grief from the start is isolating. and yet also other people are the answer. Yeah.

And often when we need others the most, it's when we push them away the most as well. It's a kind of a funny contradiction of being human, or a paradox, true and it's complicated to ask for help, and it's complicated even to have help offered to you. it's complicated for all of us in many ways.

[00:38:35] **Susan:** And I guess if we were all a bit more open to everything then it would just resolve itself as well.

[00:38:42] **Jess:** I think so. I think so much fits about feeling confident to feel the way you do, to grow the confidence, to own your grief, to say, this is how I feel, and that's okay.

[00:38:53] **Susan:** Yeah. Yeah. And I suppose we could, there's, it's been a lot of awareness about depression and mental illnesses and so on over the last few years, it really has



increased and that phrase, it's okay to not feel okay or to not be okay, is used a lot more now. does it need to be expanded to encompass everything that is human basically.

[00:39:24] **Jess:** it really does. it does. and often, and you mentioned depression. So much. Depression is unresolved grief, anxiety is a natural, very natural response to unresolved grief. It will be there. Depression is the kind of flat line where you're not able to feel the real despair, but you're not allowing yourself to feel much else either.

so no, absolutely. we need, yeah.

[00:39:48] **Susan:** are people surprised? That grief is often the so

[00:39:53] **Jess:** it's a good question. I think it's so little talked about. It is increasingly talked about now, but we think of the Big G and death, like we said, and we undermine the impact of other losses, I think. are people surprised? I think probably yes and no, but it all makes sense once you start to look at your life and what you've gone through it, it starts to map out and make sense and there can be pain in that discovery, but on the other side of that pain is always something better.

That's the point. That's the point. We're heading somewhere brighter and lighter. it's a heavy word by definition, it comes from the same root as gravity, gravitas, grave, it means weight, And yet on the other side of that is lightness, is joy is everything you've wanted, but it's actually having to go through it.

[00:40:43] **Susan:** And it's making me think of, David White. I don't know if Yes. And David White would talk about heartbreak and the inevitability of heartbreak, and we all go through life trying to dodge, having our heart it's broken, but actually there's a maturity to, to facing, into having our hearts broken and we should do the things that break our heart and come out the other side of it.

[00:41:06] **Jess:** Yes. To a certain degree, absolutely. Yeah. No, it is just called living, isn't it? It's called being alive. It's what kind of life do you want? Do you want a slightly muted shut down life, or do you want a full spectrum life? And again, we can say that with care and nuance. you don't have to, you can titrate this, you can go in bit by bit.

You don't have to throw yourself in, 100%. You can gently, gently nudge your way into all of this.

[00:41:32] **Susan:** And I think it's back to the container as well, Jess, that you talked about because. When we do feel safer or held, then it is okay to release some of that. But otherwise, we are doing our best, without the understanding.



[00:41:50] **Jess:** That's absolutely true, and so much of it is about finding the people who you feel you can be yourself with, and maybe accepting that those who can't, maybe you can't make that person. Maybe there'll be a never ending unresolved grief about the fact that this person in your life is never going to be able to give you what you need, but shift your focus to the people and actually you could get complete with that relationship.

So it's something you could do there in the grief recovery method, and yet you could also shift your focus to the people who can give you what you need, where you feel comfortable. It's about giving ourselves the permission to be ourselves, giving ourselves the permission to be human.

[00:42:31] **Susan:** We, it's such a shame that we have to, isn't it

[00:42:35] **Jess:** I

[00:42:35] **Susan:** like it's. There's a grief to that.

[00:42:38] **Jess:** Yes. There's a lot to grieve. There's a lot to grieve at the moment. Yeah.

[00:42:43] **Susan:** but I also love what you say because on the other side of it is, it's what we've talked about. There's technicolor, there's joy, there's lightness, and grief is part and parcel of humanity and your journey through life. So why ignore it or deny it?

[00:43:02] **Jess:** That's right. Yeah. Yeah. And I know it can sound simplistic or glib, but it's not. It's about making it okay to feel what you feel, making it normal and natural, realizing how normal and natural it is.

[00:43:17] **Susan:** and if we think about it as well, many of the songs and the poems that are out in the world are about love, death, grief.

[00:43:26] **Jess:** Absolutely. Yeah.

[00:43:27] **Susan:** I. So we, we know it. I think, that's what you said. I, when I asked you how people feel about it being the source and there's a recognition. I guess we do, we know it when we feel into it or when it just makes sense somehow.

[00:43:43] **Jess:** Yeah, I think it's really understanding. It's not just sadness. I mean, even sadness has so many flavors to it. You know, there's sadness that feels quite sweet, almost pleasant, almost like. Bittersweet and then the sadness that's just devastating and raw, and there's so many flavors. if we could expand our emotional vocabulary, expand our literacy, our emotional literacy, it would really help us learn to be with ourselves first, and then as a result of that, other people more too, and understanding that this is really about.



not only being truthful, but living. Living as fully as we want to. Engaging with life, participating in life in a way that makes real sense.

[00:44:26] **Susan:** People will assume, I think. If you work in grief recovery or with grief at work, wherever, that it is hard, depressing, awful work. But I doubt that is the reality.

Do you want the honest answer? No, talking about the truth here. Remember.

[00:44:51] **Jess:** Oh, we are. It's not always easy yet. I leave every session lighter than when I went in. honestly, I work with people who are dying and I might go, oof, there was a lot there and I might need to shake. I'll need to look after myself. I need good supervision.

I might shake, I might all sorts of things, but I have to tell you, I leave every day lighter than when I went into it. It's the most joyous, uplifting work I could ever hope to do. I love it. The gravity of it just makes it lighter and brighter. I love what I do. I wouldn't choose another job. I wouldn't go back to performing on.

I mean, I might perform on a stage, but it doesn't give me what this gives me.

[00:45:34] **Susan:** That's incredible and I can see it in you. That's the thing. I can see it in you, Jess. If someone would like to know more about you and what you do and even just explore this concept that we've been talking about. It's not a concept, it's a reality that we've been talking about. How might they do that?

[00:46:01] **Jess:** they can, there's two things. There's Find me, I'm Jess Goyder. My last name is G-O-Y-D-E-R. Jess Goyder just said as it's spelled. I'm online and I run free donation only workshops, grief introduction workshops. I lead groups. And that's a really accessible way of being led through the grief recovery method.

If you think your organization could benefit, I could come in and do a one hour talk or a two and a half hour workshop or work in a deeper way. And I love working with leaders because leaders in me of many shapes and sizes, and like I say, this is leadership work, but if you have the courage to face your pain.

Turn towards it and see something possible on the other side of it, even if it's just a hunch, even when you can't see it. Really. Obviously in that moment, there are so many reasons why grief work is leadership work. So I think working individually, and the next thing I'd say is the Grief Recovery Handbook.

It's an absolutely brilliant book, the Grief Recovery Method. I wish it was available all over the uk. It's so little known. Of course the practitioner matters so much, but it's the most



beautiful evidence-based methodology that whoever you do it with, however you approach it, find a group, find a practitioner.

It takes seven sessions usually, and it will transform. I hate I, I use the word transform. It feels so reused. It will change how you see yourself and your life, and it will equip you for loss for the rest of your life. There's nothing better you could hope to do really than feel. Okay.

I've unlearnt what's not helpful, and I've learned what is helpful and I feel complete about the most painful loss of my life. That's what happens as a result of it. So it's pretty profound work and I just wish everyone knew about it. I wish it was on the NHS, but maybe one day.

[00:47:47] **Susan:** Maybe one day. Exactly. Jess, thank you so much for that conversation. It's it's been so interesting actually, and I know the interesting isn't the best word,

[00:47:58] **Jess:** Oh, it's fine.

[00:47:59] **Susan:** Yeah, we covered a lot and, but I also feel it's a drop in the ocean and so I do hope people go and find out more for themselves.

I know I will.

[00:48:10] **Jess:** Thank you. No, it's just to plant a seed really. Maybe that seed can grow, but. it is exploring this. It's not being afraid to say death, dying dead. it's facing the reality of what life actually is. There's nothing bigger or better you can do.

[00:48:26] **Susan:** exactly. Thank you.

[00:48:29] **Jess:** Thank you so much for having me. I've loved talking to you, Susan. Thank you.

