

Colouring Through Tears

An Adult Colouring Book in Times of Loss

This colouring book is for adults experiencing loss, or grief (the reaction to loss). Loss and grief are part of the fabric of life. They are not illnesses or disorders – they are normal. Losses seldom exist in isolation. Most often there are also secondary or associate losses and the grief one feels is proportionate to the role or importance the person or thing held in our lives. The greater the love or attachment to the person, or thing we have lost, the greater will be our pain.

Loss and grief can bring with them a wide variety of intense and often conflicting emotions. Grief is messy! It can leave us feeling like we're going crazy. We may feel restless, anxious, lonely, embarrassed, and want to withdraw. For many, grief may be a very private experience. The way we express our grief is unique to each of us. Many individuals may be affected by the same loss, yet respond in very different ways.

In recent years, scientific studies have found evidence of the health benefits and calming effects associated with practices such as reflection, meditation, mindfulness and prayer. The key to reaping these benefits lies in the skill of learning to pay attention to one thing at a time. This book has been designed to combine these practices with the simple task of colouring as a way of helping to focus on the words offered in the images.

The hand drawn images presented are intentionally imperfect - sometimes borderless - patterns which do not necessarily resemble anything. The patterns are intended to stimulate your own interpretation of the symbols and free your mind to meditate on the words. Some will find this aspect an uncomfortable challenge! However, it can creatively stretch the ability to positively adapt to the content that is in front of you, whatever it is, in the here and now, as you bring colour to it. This can be true in life too. If your mind wonders, as it probably will, bring it back gently, without judgment, to focus again on the words in the image.

Some pages are intentionally incomplete for you to add your own meaningful words or patterns.

Proceed with self-compassion, gently and patiently.

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About the Author

I am a registered clinical counsellor with counselling, psychology and Christian ministry qualifications, working in private practice on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, where I live with my husband of 43 years.

My hope is that this book will be a simple, easy and thoughtful companion through grief. Drawing from my own experience of losses throughout my life, including the death of our son, immigration, loss of other loved ones, forced changes in career, loss of beloved pets, and health challenges, I think I would have benefitted from having something not too challenging or requiring too much effort to turn my attention to in those long, empty, lonely, even restless hours, when my emotions tumbled and tears dropped. Having something like colouring to help me feel ever so slightly productive as I haltingly transitioned from - in Judith Murray's¹ terms - the world that was to the world that is, would have helped.

You are unique; your expression of grief is unique. With the deepest respect, I offer you this option of colouring through the tears.

Zea Eagle

B.Couns, Grad Dip Min, Grad Dip Psych, PACFA Reg., PACFA Accredited Supervisor, CCAA(Clin), ARCAP

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¹ Murray, J. (2016). *Understanding Loss – A guide for caring for those facing adversity*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Tips and techniques

Colouring can be done anywhere and anytime for a few minutes or for hours on end. However, to get the best out of the experience, choose a place that is comfortable to the task and set aside half an hour or longer.

Print the images on 220 gsm or thicker for best results.

Have a little fun (even though your heart is heavy) choosing coloured pens or pencils. The enjoyment is in the process, not so much in the end result, so do not worry about what the picture is going to look like at the end. You can print it off again and redo it in different colours at a later point if you want to.

Try using fine liners to outline, and coloured pencils to fill in. Some coloured pencils are able to be mixed with water to give a water colour effect, and others can be blended by rubbing over them with a tissue. Experiment with blending colours and shading – play! Or, you may experiment with black and white only.

Don't be afraid to modify the image if you want to – let your creative juices flow and express yourself freely. Add bits; fill bits in with curls or patterns using fine liners. There is no right or wrong.

Getting started

- Look at the image you want to colour in and decide on your palette.
- Have your chosen pens and pencils ready.
- Notice your body and what you can feel – the chair, the floor under your feet...
- Read the words in the image, then reread them.
- Read them aloud a couple of times.
- Pick up your pen or pencil and start colouring.
- Let the words marinate with you.
- Without judgment, notice the effect they have on you and the thoughts they evoke.
- If your mind wanders, gently bring it back, non-judgmentally, to the words in front of you.
- Keep coming back to the words.
- Note your responses (thoughts and feelings) on the flip side of your page, or in a journal.
- Use the incomplete pages to add your own reflections or words.

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