

The Long Lost Year

Resource Pack



Local Trust



About The Long Lost Year

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've all had to learn to live alongside experiences of loss - from loss of connection; loss of a sense of purpose or achievement; to loss of loved ones; loss of jobs; loss of rites of passage like graduations or school prom. There have also been things we've been happy to let go of, as well as things we've gained.

Local Trust teamed up with The Loss Project and RIOT SOUP to offer different spaces for residents in Big Local areas to reflect, honour and share their own stories of loss, to discover how creativity can help us process our experiences, as well as opportunities to grow confidence in conversations about loss and grief.

About this Resource Pack

This resource pack offers a range of creative activities and resources to watch and download, to enable you to bring art-based experiences, reflecting on grief and loss, to meetings and group sessions in your local area. Some of these are related to the pandemic, but they can easily be adjusted to focus on other losses or experiences of grief.

You'll find creative workshops to run in groups, exercises you can do individually, and ideas on how to set up your own Long Lost Year exhibition. There's also support on how to have conversations about grief and loss generally, how to take care of yourself when supporting others, as well as national organisations you can signpost people towards.

This is a collection of creative resources from artist contributors to The Long Lost Year Project including: The Loss Project, RIOT SOUP, Alison Curry, Belinda Latimer and Sarah Palmer who have designed and facilitated workshops for this project.

We wanted to offer out the creative ways we've designed as part of The Long Lost Year to reflect, process and honour the many different losses we've experienced personally, professionally and as communities during the pandemic.

Loss is something we all experience throughout our lives, yet it is something that is often a taboo. At The Loss Project, we believe that we all have a part to play in supporting those around us experiencing loss and grief and that you don't need to be an 'expert' or professional to be able to be in solidarity with others going through a difficult time.

We hope these resources will inspire different and creative ways for people to express their experiences of loss, as well as be alongside and connect with others.

How to use this Resource Pack

Any of these resources can be used as stand alone experiences you could try on your own, with friends or family or even with a small group. You could offer these out to people you know to share their artwork digitally too.

We've tried to create a breadth of different activities, as well as some ideas on how to support yourself if you're experiencing loss. Of course, there may be times where you, or those around you, need extra support, so we've added links to other resources, groups and organisations who you might like to connect with.

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Exploring Loss Creatively: Giving Loss a Shape

Steph Turner, Artist, The Loss Project

This is a quick drawing exercise that anyone can do. You don't need to think of yourself as "good" at drawing or art. In fact, what you draw isn't important; it is more about what it symbolises for you, as well as the opportunity to express yourself without using words. You could do this on your own or together with people you know.

Take 5 minutes to draw out your experiences, feelings or thoughts about loss - any kind of loss. You're invited to give your experience of loss a shape or many shapes. You don't need to plan out an image, just go with whatever comes to your hand, pen and paper. You could use a pen or pencil - black and white or colours. If you want, pop some music on and just allow yourself to draw...



Reflections

What does this image look like or symbolise to you?
Is there anything that surprised you about this drawing?
How did it feel to draw it out?

In Pairs or Groups

Invite each person, if they feel comfortable to, to share their reflections on their own image or how they found the experience of drawing. Listen and take in each person's reflections. At the end, take a moment to appreciate each other's sharing.



Exploring Loss Creatively: Banners of Protest, Rememberance & Hope

Steph Turner, Artist, The Loss Project

Banners have been used for centuries; from messages of protest to advertising, they're a simple but effective way of sharing an important statement with the world.

This is a simple creative exercise you can use to create your own banner. You can make a paper banner using a pen or pencil and piece of paper, you could make a paper collage banner using magazines and newspaper clippings or you could make a fabric banner using fabric scraps, a needle and thread.

Take a moment to reflect on your experiences of loss during the pandemic. What are you angry about? What are you glad about? What do you want to treasure about something or someone you lost? What helped get you through these experiences? What were you happy to let go of? What or who do you want to remember? What are you hopeful for?

Choose one word, short sentence or small quote that resonates with you about your experience that you want to honour on your banner.

Create the background for your word or sentence. It could be a square or rectangle or another shape you'd like to use. It could be large or small. You could simply use a blank piece of paper, or draw or collage a patterned background, or find some old fabric like an old pillowcase or tea towel, for example.

Spend some time creating the letters of the statement or word you've chosen for your banner; make them as big, bold and clear as you can. You might find it helpful to divide up your background, making sure you know what size each letter needs to be to fit.

You could draw letters out and colour them in using a marker pen, you could cut them out of colourful pieces of paper or from letters in newspaper clippings. If you're using fabric, you could use different scraps for each letter and use different colour threads to attach them onto your background fabric.

When you've glued or pieced it all together, take a moment to admire your creation. You might want to display it somewhere people can see it - it could be an interesting talking point? Perhaps you'd prefer to keep it somewhere just for yourself to mark something important for you?

Making banners in a group

Why not give time for everyone to share about the word they've chosen before you get making. You could have some quiet time whilst making to reflect on the different words people have chosen. You could even attach your banners together or work on a collective word, phrase or quote. If you're using different materials, you could always join your creations by taking a photo of each piece and putting them together digitally. Allow for some time at the end of your session to offer appreciation of each other's creative work and stories.



Exploring Loss Creatively: Collage

Asma Istwani, Artist, RIOT SOUP

What you will need

- Paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Collaging materials such as magazines, newspapers (even packaging scraps, leftover wrapping paper, junk mail)

Warm up exercise

Set 5 minutes on a timer and challenge yourself to collage a face, heart or tree before the alarm goes off. The point of this exercise is to get collaging straight away. The time pressure element forces you to get out of your head and connected to your creativity in because you need to beat the timer!

Main exercise

For this exercise you can take as long as you need and in fact, slow collaging is recommended as the point of this exercise is to connect with your emotion and thoughts.

Take a moment to look through your materials and rip out and set aside images, colours, shapes and patterns that speak to you most. With all the media you collect you will create something that honours your loss, it could reflect a general feeling or thought or depict a memory. Assemble your cutouts on a piece of paper or page of a magazine to create something that is meaningful to you. It can be a very detailed collage or something more abstract which may not look like anything obvious to anyone else but you.

If working in groups you may want to go around the room at the end and do a show and tell of the work you created and explain what the different elements mean or signify.



Exploring Loss Creatively: Finding the Familiar

Belinda Latimer, Artist

This is a simple creative task that can last as long as you want it to. Try not to be afraid of letting your inner artist out. They need to be let loose sometimes!

On A4 paper, using a pen (a biro is fine) write a word that describes to you, how you feel when you think of your loss... Make this fill the page and if you can, use joined-up writing for it. Then, turn the page around and do the same again, using a different word, using any available space on your paper. Repeat this until you have run out of words and space...

Now, find a different coloured pen, pencil or felt tip and inside the words that you have 'drawn', find some areas to colour in. This can be neat or, quite expressive and scratchy in its appearance. If you wish, you can draw a line inside some of the shapes, outlining the space.

Repeat this with different colours. You can stick to a range of colours that you really like, or have meaning to you. You will see patterns and shapes starting to emerge from your artwork, even recognise some as familiar things. Keep doing this until you are happy with the layout and colour distribution or keep going until you run out of space...



Exploring Loss Creatively: Layers of Loss

Alison Curry, Artist

Holding Space

Before you begin to create, take a moment to reflect on the last 18 months, think about a loss that is significant to you. Loss means different things to different people and is very personal. It could be a large loss or a small loss, there is no right or wrong way to create your artwork so relax knowing what you produce will be special and unique to you and your experiences.

Getting Started

Choose a piece of paper to begin your creative journey. You might like to choose a plain piece of any colour or a patterned sheet from a magazine or newspaper. Whichever type of paper you have chosen, make sure you choose something to write with that will be easy to read. You could use pencil, felt tip pens, biro, crayons, coloured pencils, a pen, or anything you have on hand which could make a mark.

Finding Words

Finding the words to describe your loss. You can either do this stage of the journey on a scrap piece of paper or straight onto your artwork. You can draw the words or print them or perhaps choose a mixture if you prefer. Some words could be... forgotten, empty, confused, uncertain, letting go, relief, ending. The words you choose will not necessarily be negative ones - choose those which describe your loss best.

Transformation

Now is the time to transform your creation, using scissors, a hole punch or simply by tearing and removing pieces from your artwork. Put those removed pieces aside while you work but don't discard them. The paper snowflake method is good for this (Have a look at [here](#) for steps on how to fold the paper if you've not done it before).

Nothing is ever truly lost - the memory remains

Once you have removed all the pieces and you are happy with your work, glue or place the piece of paper onto another piece to create a layered effect. You may wish to stick all the pieces down or just in certain places to create a sense of depth.

Now, select another piece of paper as the background for your memory piece of artwork created using the removed pieces from your original piece - you can either glue them in position or place them down and take a photograph. You can simply create, enjoy, and discard. You may choose to collage them into interesting shapes or have a more random approach.

At this stage you could add words of hope or positivity which have occurred in your life since your loss or general feelings or descriptions of the positive experiences of the pandemic.

Reflection

You may wish to share your creative journey with a friend or family member and discuss your loss further or repeat the process again from a different perspective.



Other Links to Other Creative Resources to Explore Loss

Here are some other creative resources created by The Loss Project and their partners which you might also like to try out.

The Grief Compass

A digital booklet created by artists who've experienced grief offering different creative ways to process what you're experiencing

The Loss Project's Epistle Poem

A simple poetry structure in the form of a letter offering a way to honour someone

The Loss Project's Journaling Prompts

Ideas on how to build a journaling practice, as well as journal prompts to start you off.

The Artists' Grief Deck

Online 'flashcards' designed by artists offering different 'grieving prompts'; small actions to take in memoriam for someone or something whose loss they are grieving.



Self Care and Loss: Grounding Exercise

Steph Turner, Artist, The Loss Project

Loss can impact us in so many ways; at times we can feel overwhelmed by our emotions and thoughts. You might find it helpful to try different strategies to ground yourself in these moments.

We've created a short audio recording of a body scan meditation to help you ground yourself, take a few moments out of daily life and connect with your body.

We often forget to connect to our bodies when thoughts are whirring around, but doing something that grounds us and reminds us of our physical body can be a simple and helpful way to try and relax a little more and be in the present. You'll need:

- About 5 minutes
- Some headphones if you have them
- Somewhere you can sit comfortably without being interrupted
- When you're ready, click on this [link](#) to listen to the audio recording.

Other Links

There are lots of other self care, grounding and relaxation exercises out there that you might find suit you better. Here are a few to have a look at:

Quick Relaxation Techniques - created by Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust

Insight Timer - A free app for sleep, anxiety and stress with more than 100k guided meditations

Colour Breathing Visualisation - Recording from Health Minds Lincolnshire

Bereavement Support and Self Care Guide - from Mind

DeStress Monday Campaign - Weekly practices in breathing, mindfulness and positivity to refresh your mind on a Monday



Self Care and Loss: Top Tips for Self Care

There is no right or wrong way to process grief and loss. Finding space and taking time to find what works for you is vital. Here are some top tips from The Loss Project to support your wellbeing. Find what works for you no matter how big or small.

Take time out for you

That might mean having a duvet day, getting creative, reading a book, getting outdoors for a walk, turning off your phone for a few hours or having a nap. Find the things that help you wind down if you can. Perhaps think back to what's helped in the past.

- What helps you to relax?
- What small things have brought you joy before?
- Is there something you can say no to?

Connect

It's ok to feel like you don't want to talk, you don't have to do or say anything you don't want to but sometimes reaching out and connecting with others can help us to feel less alone, and can even be life affirming. Find the right person, group or people for you to connect with and share.

- Who do you feel most comfortable talking to?
- Could you tell them what you need from them?
- What groups, or other networks could you tap into?

5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing

Research by the New Economics Foundation has shown that these five things can have a positive difference on your mental wellbeing:

- Connect
- Being Active
- Mindfulness and Taking Notice of the Present
- Learn
- Give

These don't have to be big tasks, but could be small things we fit into our daily lives to help give us a boost. Find out more on [Mind](#) and the [NHS](#) websites.

Top Tips for Self Care When Supporting Others Experiencing Loss

Sometimes when we're supporting others experiencing loss and grief, it can have an impact on us too. Here are some top tips from The Loss Project based on their own experiences of supporting others:

- Check in with yourself after having a conversation - how are you feeling?
- Acknowledge that these conversations can be tough and may trigger memories or feelings from your own experiences - that's a normal reaction to talking about grief and loss.
- Often there isn't a perfect thing to say to someone who has experienced loss - be reassured that it's better to say something than nothing at all.
- Don't put pressure on yourself to 'fix' anything or have the answers.
- Reach out to others if you need to talk too.
- Remember that you're not a counsellor - it's great to be a listening ear but you can also signpost people to their GP and other organisations who can offer additional support.



Self Care and Loss: Who Else Can Help?

If you don't think there's anyone you feel you can talk to, or if you think you, or someone you know, needs more formal support there are lots of organisations who can help. Here are a few national organisations who you could reach out to or that you could signpost others to.

There are also likely to be other local organisations near you who can help and you can always reach out to your GP or the Samaritans.

National organisations

At a Loss - Signposting to worldwide support for people affected by loss and grief

BAATN - The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network, informed by an understanding of intersectionality, with people who identify as Black, African, South Asian and Caribbean

BAMEStream - Bereavement support to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic adults who have been affected by the death of a loved one due to Covid-19

Cruse - National bereavement charity with a helpline: 0808 808 1677

Good Grief Trust - Advice and support for people who are bereaved

Grief Encounter - Supporting bereaved children and young people

Healing Justice London - safe spaces for healing to communities that are marginalised, led by people of colour and lived experience, working on the intersections of oppression, health, healing and liberation practice

Let's Talk About Loss - Meetups across the UK for young people aged 18-35, projects and campaigns encouraging everyone to talk about grief

Samaritans - Open to anyone who needs to talk, 24 hours a day -
Phone: 116 123

Sudden - help and support when someone has died suddenly

The Loss Project - online resources, events and projects exploring loss in all its forms

Winston's Wish - Support for grieving children and families



In Your Community: Conversation Starters

Here are a number of different 'finish the sentence' ways you could open up conversations about loss in your community.

You could use these in groups to start a conversation or change the wording to reflect personally, as an individual.

You might want to draw, collage, paint, sing, voice note or write out the rest of the sentence.

If you wanted to open up conversations in your local community or group, you could create a community chalkboard or Post It wall to encourage people to share their own thoughts anonymously. These are offered as a range of different starting points to having more dialogue about loss.

We'd love to see what you're inspired to create in your local community.

We want to honour...

What we long for is...

We've gained..

We're angry about...

We keep what we've lost alive by...

We've cherished...

The hardest part for us has been...

We've found humour in...

What's been forgotten is...

We want to let go of...

What we hope for is...

Something unique about our loss is...

We remember by...

We want to make space for...

What we want the world to know about loss is...

We don't want to ever forget...



In Your Community: Having Conversations with People Experiencing Loss and Grief

We love this [video](#) by Refuge in Grief illustrating “How to help a grieving friend”. Have a watch and see what you think - it’s only 4 minutes long.

Here are some of The Loss Project’s top tips based on what people who have experienced loss have told us:

- It's really important to acknowledge what's happened - don't avoid the person or the subject and let the loss become the ‘elephant in the room’.
- Saying "I'm so sorry" and "I can't imagine how you must be feeling, do you want to talk more about it?" could be a good start; be led by the other person and meet them where they are at the moment.

- It's great to offer a listening ear. Listening and asking gentle, open questions are some of the best things you can offer when that person is ready to talk.
- You can say the person who's died's name or name the loss someone is experiencing - it can also be great to share memories of that person or to talk about what was important about what has been lost.
- Remember that no loss is the same - we might perceive that one type of loss might be worse than another based on our own experiences, but that might not be true for that person. Instead of sharing your own experiences, focus on asking that person more about what's going on for them.
- Resist the urge to offer solutions or 'fix' how that person is feeling - we can't take away what's happened but we can create space for someone to talk about what they need to with no expectation or pressure to change how they're currently feeling.



In Your Community: Tips for Working in Groups

If you're giving these creative exercises a go with others, it's great to offer time and space for reflections and sharing and appreciating each other once everyone has had a chance to share that wants to. At the beginning, you might also want to set some principles for the space as a group based on what the group feels is important to them, for example, keeping what's shared in the group confidential. You might also want to offer a 'check in' to see how everyone is feeling today. There are lots of different ways to do this but you might find using a visual mood scale helpful - [here are a few examples](#).

We want to note that these spaces aren't for formal counselling or therapy, but that you can signpost people to local or national organisations or groups if someone does need more support.

The reality is that 'uncomfortable' feelings may well come up for people because we're talking about experiences that may be painful. We all grieve differently and there's no right or wrong way to process grief or loss. We'd encourage you to offer a listening ear, without pressure to 'fix' what that person has shared or offer solutions.

The power in sharing with other people - if we're in a space where we feel safe enough to do so - is that we can create space for each other to feel heard, and that can help us to feel less alone with our experiences. From doing this work ourselves, we know that we can't take away what has already happened, but we can offer to listen, express empathy and walk alongside that person through the difficult times, as well as the good.

With special thanks to:

Asma Istwani, design
Stephanie Turner, author