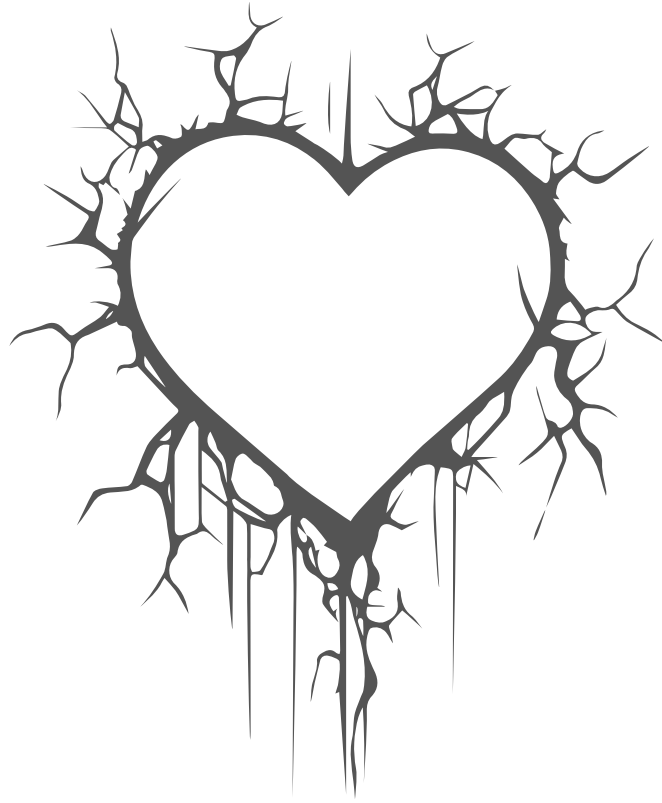


Loss Within the Walls



Coping with Grief While Incarcerated

Grief can be especially difficult in a correctional setting where access to support is limited, and emotions can feel heightened. This booklet aims to guide you through understanding your grief, expressing your feelings, and finding healthy ways to cope.

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Loss Within the Walls: Coping with Grief While Incarcerated

Produced in the United States

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Loss Within the Walls

Coping with Grief While Incarcerated

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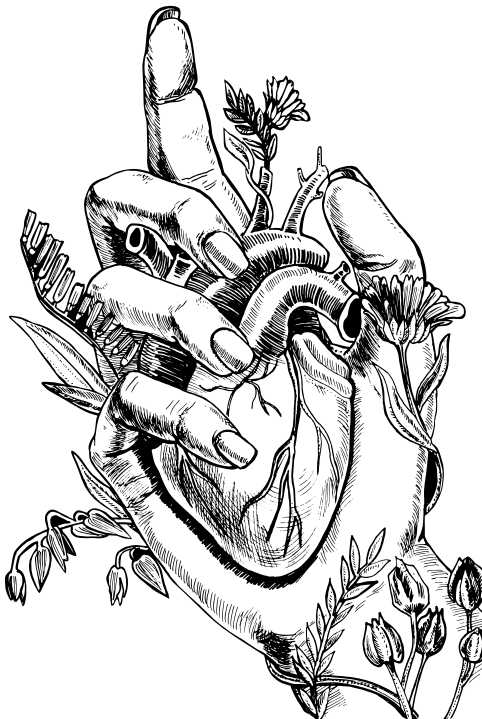
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Loss Within the Walls

Coping with Grief While Incarcerated

INTRODUCTION

Grief can be overwhelming, and when you're incarcerated, it can feel even more isolating. Whether you've lost a loved one, are grieving your freedom, or are mourning any other kind of loss, this booklet is designed to help you understand and cope with your feelings.



Section 1: Understanding Grief

1.1 WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is a natural response to loss. Grief can be felt emotionally, physically, and mentally. Understanding what grief is and how it affects you can help you process it more effectively.

Loss can come in many forms: the death of someone close to you, the end of a relationship, the loss of freedom, or even the loss of hope or security.

Grief can show up as sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, or numbness. It can also affect your physical health, sleep, and energy levels.

1.2 TYPES OF GRIEF

There are different types of grief you may experience, such as:

Normal grief: Nothing feels normal about it, as it involves intense feelings of sadness, sorrow, and longing. However, these feelings, while they may never fully go away, diminish after time, allowing you to move forward in life.

Anticipatory grief: Grieving before a loss happens (e.g., anticipating the death of someone or a future event).

Disenfranchised grief: When you feel your grief is not acknowledged or supported (e.g., grieving a loss that others don't understand, like loss of freedom).

1.2 TYPES OF GRIEF (CONT.)

Delayed grief: Grief that is postponed or suppressed and may surface later, often triggered by a specific event or memory. In some cases, you may not experience grief immediately following a loss and instead experience it much later, sometimes years after the event.

Prolonged grief: When grief doesn't seem to get easier as the years pass.

Prolonged grief is classified as a mental health condition. If you've been experiencing intense longing/yearning for the deceased or are preoccupied with thoughts or memories of them nearly every day, you may have prolonged grief.

PROLONGED GRIEF

Additionally, if you're regularly experiencing at least three of the following symptoms, consider talking to a mental health professional:

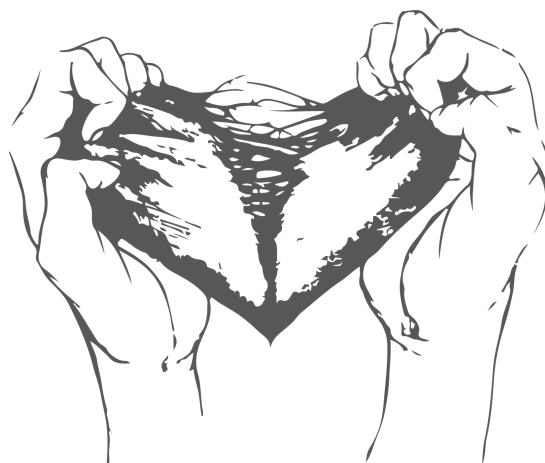
- ☐ Feeling as though you've lost a part of yourself
- ☐ Having a sense of disbelief about the death
- ☐ Avoiding anything that reminds you the person is gone
- ☐ Having intense emotional pain (including anger, bitterness, etc.)
- ☐ Having difficulty doing activities you once enjoyed
- ☐ Experiencing numbness
- ☐ Feeling hopeless or that life is meaningless
- ☐ Experiencing intense loneliness



1.3 MY GRIEF

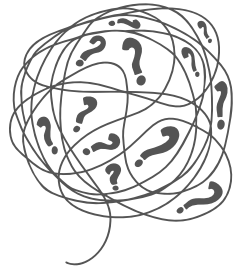
Take a moment to think about what you are grieving right now. What has brought your grief? Write about the loss you are experiencing:

Who or what are you grieving?



1.3 MY GRIEF (CONT.)

What feelings come up when you think about this loss?



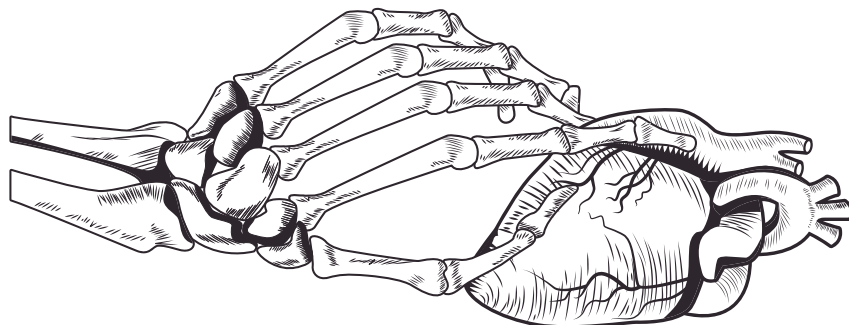


Section 2: Expressing Grief

2.1 JOURNALING YOUR FEELINGS

Sometimes, writing down your feelings can be a powerful way to release some of the heaviness of grief. Below are some journaling prompts to guide you through expressing your emotions:

What do you miss the most about what you've lost?



2.1 JOURNALING YOUR FEELINGS (CONT.)

How have you changed physically and emotionally since the loss?

Do you have any new fears since the loss?

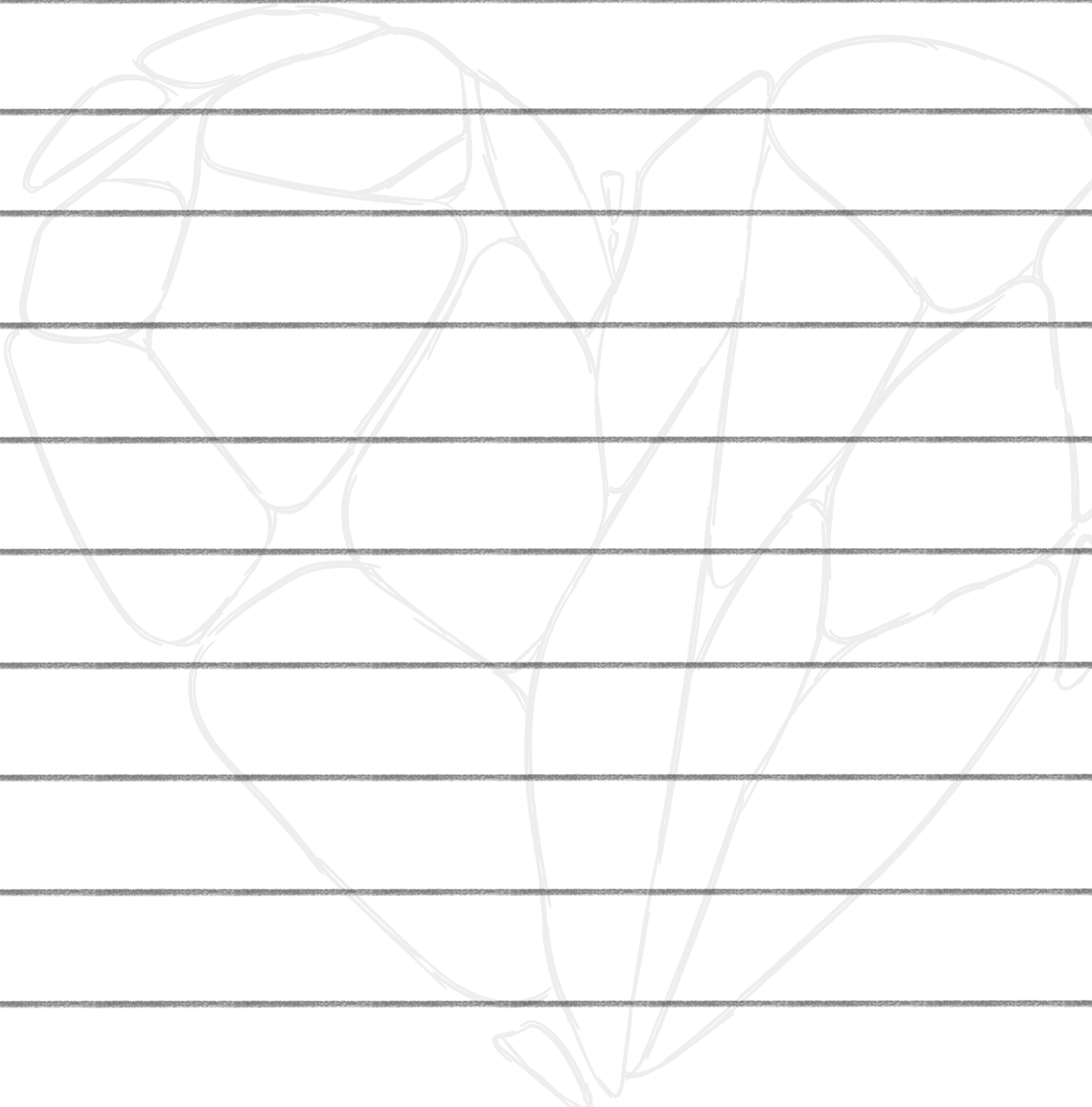
2.1 JOURNALING YOUR FEELINGS (CONT.)

What do you wish you could say to the person or thing you've lost?

2.2 LETTER TO YOUR LOVED ONE

Even if you can't speak directly to the person you're mourning, you can still express yourself. On the next page, write a letter to the deceased or to address your loss. You can tell them how much you miss them, what you wish you could say, or any feelings you want to express.

2.2 LETTER TO YOUR LOVED ONE (CONT.)



A series of horizontal lines for writing, with a large, faint, stylized heart outline in the background.

Section 3: Grieving Behind Bars

3.1 COPING STRATEGIES

Grief can make it difficult to manage day-to-day life, especially in a correctional setting, where your emotional resources may feel stretched thin. Below are some coping strategies that may help you in this environment.

Mindfulness & Breathing Exercises

Mindfulness practices help you stay present and grounded. Try the following breathing exercise when you feel overwhelmed:

1. Take a deep breath in through your nose for a count of 4.
2. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 6.
4. Repeat 5 times, focusing on your breath.

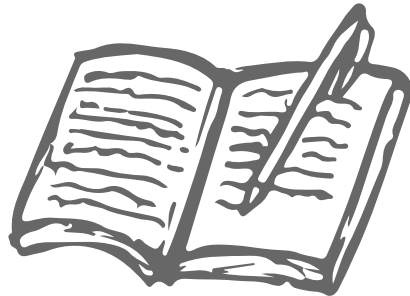
3.1 COPING STRATEGIES (CONT.)

Physical Activity

Physical exercise can be a great way to release built-up emotional tension. If possible, engage in some form of movement each day, whether it's stretching, walking, or any available physical activity.

Creating a Routine

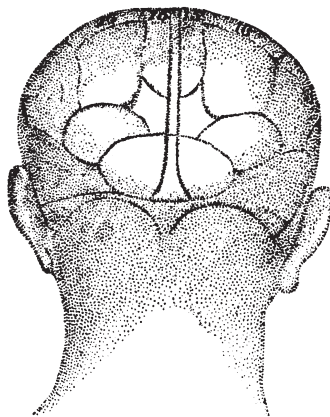
Having a daily routine can create a sense of normalcy and control. Try to include small rituals in your day, such as journaling, meditating, or reading, to help manage grief and difficult emotions.



3.2 FINDING MEANING IN GRIEF

Grief may feel pointless or overwhelming, but it can be an opportunity for growth. Journal or reflect on the following questions:

What have you learned about yourself through your grief?



3.2 FINDING MEANING IN GRIEF (CONT.)

How can your grief help you find new strength or purpose?

What can you do to honor the memory of your loss?

Section 4: Building Resilience

4.1 FINDING SUPPORT

While it might be challenging to reach out for help in jail or prison, finding support is critical. Here are some ideas for support within your environment:

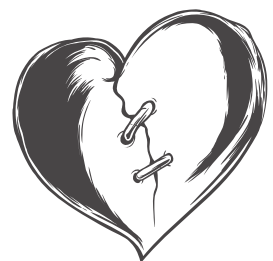
- Meet with the chaplain.
- Request to speak with a counselor.
- Connect with other incarcerated individuals who may have experienced similar losses.
- Write letters to loved ones or friends on the outside to stay connected.
- Practice self-compassion: remind yourself that grief is a normal and natural process, and it's okay to not have all the answers.

4.2 PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Being kind to yourself while grieving is vital. Below is an exercise in practicing self-compassion:

Imagine a loved one is mourning a loss. What would you say to them to comfort them? Write those words here:

Now, say those same comforting words to yourself.



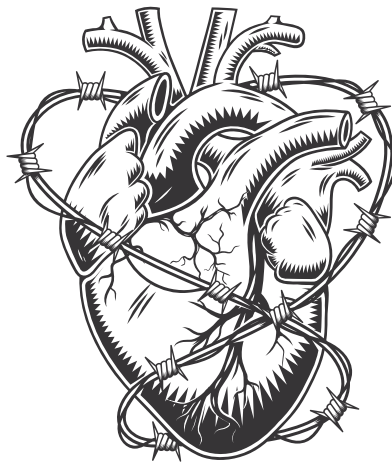
4.3 AFFIRMATIONS FOR GRIEF

Grief can sometimes leave us feeling lost or hopeless. Positive affirmations can help reframe some of these negative feelings. Below are a few examples of affirmations for grief:

"I am allowed to feel my pain and take the time I need to heal."

"Even in my sadness, I know that I am strong and capable of healing."

"With every breath, I am slowly letting go of the pain, but I will always carry the love."



4.3 AFFIRMATIONS FOR GRIEF (CONT.)

Write your own affirmations to repeat to yourself when you feel overwhelmed:



Section 5: Reflection

5.1 TRACKING YOUR GRIEF JOURNEY

Grief recovery doesn't have a timeline, and the pain can come in waves. It's important to reflect on your journey and give yourself grace during the process. Journal or reflect on the following questions:

How are you feeling today compared to last week? Last month?



5.1 TRACKING YOUR GRIEF JOURNEY

What has helped you feel even a little bit better or more at peace?

What challenges have you faced in coping with your grief while incarcerated?

5.2 FINDING MEANING

Some people discover finding new meaning in life helps them move forward. For example, consider the lessons and love you gained from the person or situation you lost. Think about how you've changed or grown because of the experience, and how you might carry those lessons forward.

Others find meaning in giving back or contributing in some way. Explore the idea of helping others. Focusing on the needs of others tends to ease feelings of grief.

Meaning can also be found in religious or spiritual practices. Whether it's through prayer, meditation, or reflection, spirituality can offer comfort and provide a sense of connection to something greater than yourself.

5.2 FINDING MEANING (CONT.)

Think about how you want to move forward. Your grief may always be a part of you, but it doesn't define you. What steps can you take to heal, grow, and find peace in the future?

RESOURCES

Death, Grief, & Hope

<https://churcharmy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/death-grief--hope---prison-version.pdf>

The Grief Recovery Method

<https://www.griefrecoverymethod.com/blog/2012/01/grief-and-incarceration>

Houses of Healing (Lionheart Foundation)

<https://lionheart.org/lionheart-programs/houses-of-healing>

Kairos Prison Ministry

<https://kairosprisonministry.org/>

Life Beyond Loss: A Workbook for Incarcerated Men

<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/life-beyond-loss-workbook-incarcerated-men>

When Death Enters Your Life: A Grief Pamphlet

<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/when-death-enters-your-life-grief-pamphlet>

Victorious Living

<https://victoriouslivingmagazine.com/prison-ministry-resources/>

NOTES

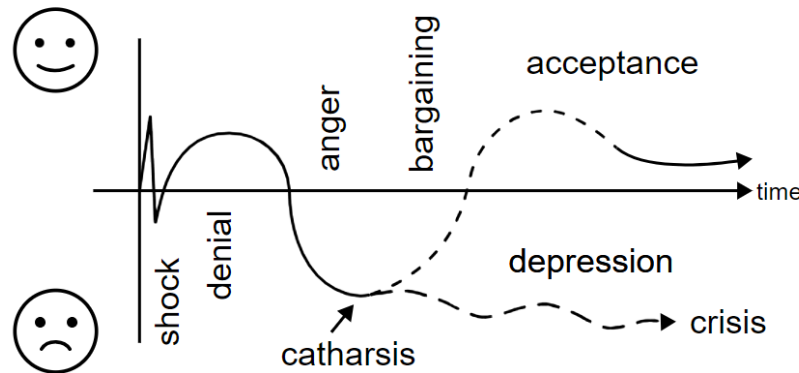
This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

NOTES

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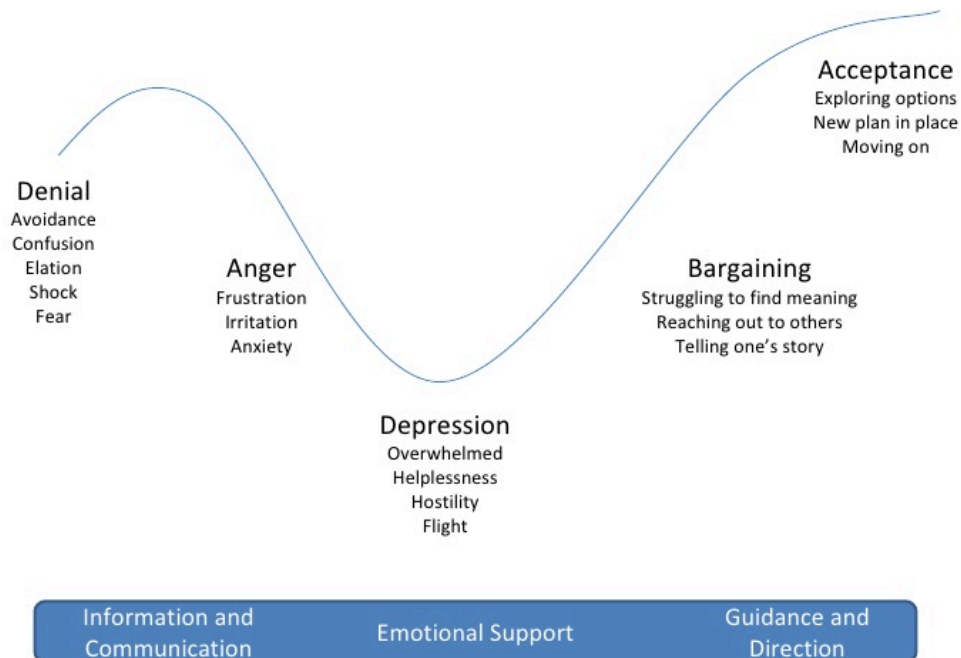
Stages of Grief & Dying

Diagram showing two possible outcomes of grief or a life-changing event (introverted depression or extroverted life enhancing overall benefit)

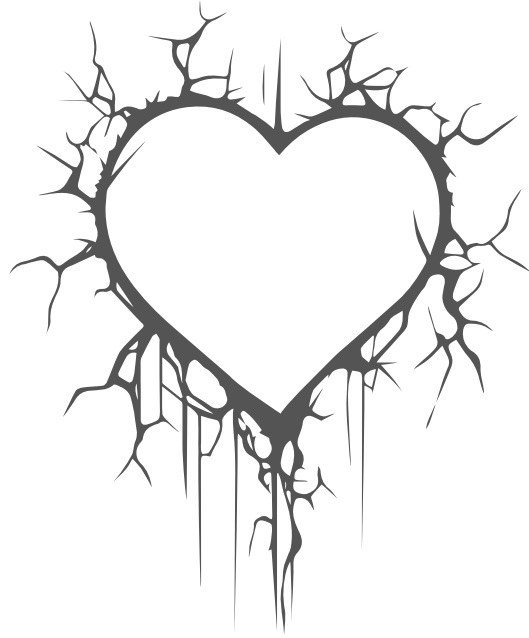


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Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle



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