



Grief River®

Animal Guides

The experience of grief can be isolating, a beloved companion has died, family members can be overwhelmed by the waves of their own grief, and friends and acquaintances are quick to return to the concerns of their own daily lives. And yet, human beings are not the only inhabitants of the Grief River. There are countless other creatures who call the river home. When we look upon this experience with the help of these animal guides, we soon discover that we are all part of something larger, and none of us are ever completely alone.

Recommendation for Use

Reflect on each animal and their relationship to the river and consider how they have adapted to the waterway environment. As we struggle with each phase of the Grief River, speak to our finned, winged, and four-legged cousins. They have wisdom that comes from their lived experience. We can ask them to teach us and show us the way. The natural world has lessons to teach us, if only we take the time to listen.

Dragonfly (Headwaters)

The dragonfly spends the majority of its life as water larva (nymphs). Because the fly phase of its life is so brief, they symbolize the importance of living in the present moment. Multifaceted eyes allow them to see 360°. The ability to look back to a time before the current loss allows us to hold onto joy amidst the sorrow, and identify preexisting resources for coping with loss.

Rainbow Trout (Rapids)

Among the thousands of fish species that make rivers their home, the rainbow trout stands out as strong swimmers and can be our guide for negotiating all of the rapids we will encounter throughout life. Observe how they find the eddies, known as places to rest amidst the rocks. The added symbolism of the rainbow provides a sign of hope in difficult times.

Heron (Run)

The great blue heron is a beautiful and graceful bird. Herons symbolize peace and calm as they stand still as statues, waiting for their next meal to swim by. Although their lives are connected to the river, they can also rise above it. The ability to see the bigger picture, allows us to see our losses in the context of the entire life.

Turtle/Alligator (Delta)

Two animal guides point to two possible outcomes when we reach the end of our own personal journey. Will you become that wise old turtle who was able to learn from facing the challenges of life, or that angry old crocodile who others try to avoid? The ability to live with love and loss is essential for a happy life.

Manatee (Rejoining the Sea)

Manatees are boundary animals. They are mammals who have the ability to travel between the fresh and saltwater worlds. They can serve as our guides as we contemplate some form of continued existence and the bonds of love that transcend labels like living and deceased.