

How Yoga Can Help With Divorce, Job Loss, and Grief

By [Beth Greenfield, Shine Staff](#) | [Healthy Living](#) – 23 hours ago

A seated twist, which represents forgiveness. Photo: DNAInfo/Mathew Katz
Yoga's well-known benefits include improving flexibility and reducing stress. But now a new class — [Yoga for Getting Over It](#)— is aiming to help its participants deal with life's biggest hurdles, from divorce and breakups to job loss and death.

“The first one I taught, we all cried and hugged,” New York-based instructor [Lisa Kirchner](#) tells Yahoo Shine. “It can get emotional.”

over the telephone,” Kirchner says. “I was really at sea.” She began having emotional responses to her various yoga poses and eventually experienced feelings of healing. “It was working on me without my realizing it,” she says. Now, years after doing yoga teacher trainings in India and after years of working as an instructor, she has developed Yoga for Getting Over It to bring others the relief it brought to her.

Her class differs in a few ways from a typical Ashtanga class, which involves synchronizing the breath with a progressive series of postures. For starters, it's longer (two hours instead of the usual 90 minutes) and uses guided visualizations that focus on getting over a loss. It also intersperses journaling with the movements, including a series of forward folds and backbends. Each pose is designed to target an aspect of getting over emotional pain. A forward fold, for example, protects the heart and helps people with the past, while backbends energize and open the heart, helping to move forward. A twist, meanwhile, represents forgiveness.

While Kirchner's class may be new, the idea of using yoga as a salve for loss is not.

“If we don't deal with the body, we can only get so far when dealing with bereavement,” [Lyn Prashant](#), an integrative grief therapist, trainer, and yoga instructor in California, tells Yahoo Shine. “It's the piece of therapy that's lacking in talk therapy.” A leader in the field of somatic grief therapy, Prashant has dubbed her approach “degriefing.” That, she notes, is “an oxymoron,” since grief is something that must be worked through, not gotten over. But the approach relies heavily on yoga poses, or asanas, in order to address what Prashant calls “somatic colloquialisms.”

“We can name what we feel in grief — that it's ‘weighing down our shoulders,’ that we feel ‘punched in the gut,’ ‘weak in the knees,’ ‘a knife in the heart,’” she explains. “Our world is shattered and scattered, and the goal is to create balance.” Yoga is an ancient practice that

allows us ways to sit with our bereavement and to help practitioners reach a balance, she adds. "But it's not as if yoga has been created to handle grief — it's that the modern world has recognized that the body must be integrated in order to heal." The journaling used in Kirchner's class, she notes, is yet another great tool for the bottom line in dealing with grief: "Expression instead of repression."

Psychologist and yoga instructor Antonio Sausys, author of "Yoga for Grief Relief," notes that the pain of bereavement can have diverse sources. "Grief is a human reaction to any loss, even though it is more often acknowledged and understood when we grieve the loss of a dear one due to death," he writes. "We may feel awkward grieving the loss of a ring. The truth is that the body [and] mind react with grief to the loss of many things or ideas: a pet, a job, a dream, or youth."

It's the essential idea behind Kirchner's teachings. "The focus of the class," she says, "is how you can get over anything."



Kirchner demonstrating a forward fold, which helps protect the heart. Photo: Lisa Kirchner/Instagram