

When Someone Dies: What You Need to Know and Can Do To Provide Support



Many of us struggle with not knowing what to say or how to support a family member, friend, colleague, or community member who is grieving a loss.

In this session, we will explore grief and offer practical ways to provide meaningful support. We will also share helpful resources to assist during this difficult time. This session aims to foster meaningful connections, helping both grievers and their support networks feel included and supported.

Guidance on offering comfort and Support after a Death





Michelle Halm, MA, M.Ed., FT, PEL

With over ten years of experience in bereavement support, Michelle Halm is the Founder and Principal Facilitator at Grief Connection Space and serves on the board of the Grief Care Network. Additionally, she works as a staff therapist at Bridgepoint Psychology Center in Chicago, Illinois. Prior to her current positions, she was the Director of Buddy's Place and School-Based Partnerships at Pillars Community Health. Michelle has authored various publications, including toolkits for the National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG).

Michelle holds the designation of Fellow in Thanatology (FT) and is a certified grief support specialist. She is also a certified trainer for the National Council for Mental Wellness in Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid. Furthermore, she has received specialized training in Suicide Bereavement, culturally sensitive approaches to grief and loss, school crisis management, among other areas. Michelle earned her Master of Education in Community Counseling from Loyola University Chicago and her Master of Arts in Education from Truman State University. In addition, she possesses her PEL (professional educators license) in secondary education and school counseling.



Sara Buttita, LSW

Sara earned her MSW from Dominican University and is a Licensed Social Worker. She believes that community education is essential for improving awareness and support for those facing loss. She aims to provide compassionate care to help individuals heal and navigate one of life's most challenging experiences.

Sara completed her clinical internship as a Bereavement Counselor at Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care. Prior to that, she interned with Pillars Community Health's Buddy's Place Program, where she helped develop and deliver grief education to local schools and families, facilitated grief support programs, and participated in outreach initiatives.

Sara recognizes that grief can arise from various life events, including divorce, illness, military service, immigration, and disability. Her community-focused work has given her a deep understanding of grief and bereavement support from both clinical and outreach perspectives.



Elizabeth Otto Haskins

Elizabeth Otto Haskins is a seasoned professional with a strong background in community service, philanthropy, and bereavement support. With extensive experience in volunteer leadership and marketing, she has effectively managed community events and sponsorships, particularly in support of children and families.

Her recent roles have included supporting philanthropic initiatives and managing sensitive communications, reflecting her dedication to making a meaningful impact in the Chicago region. Elizabeth aims to leverage her skills and passion in a role focused on benefiting the community and supporting people's bereavement needs.

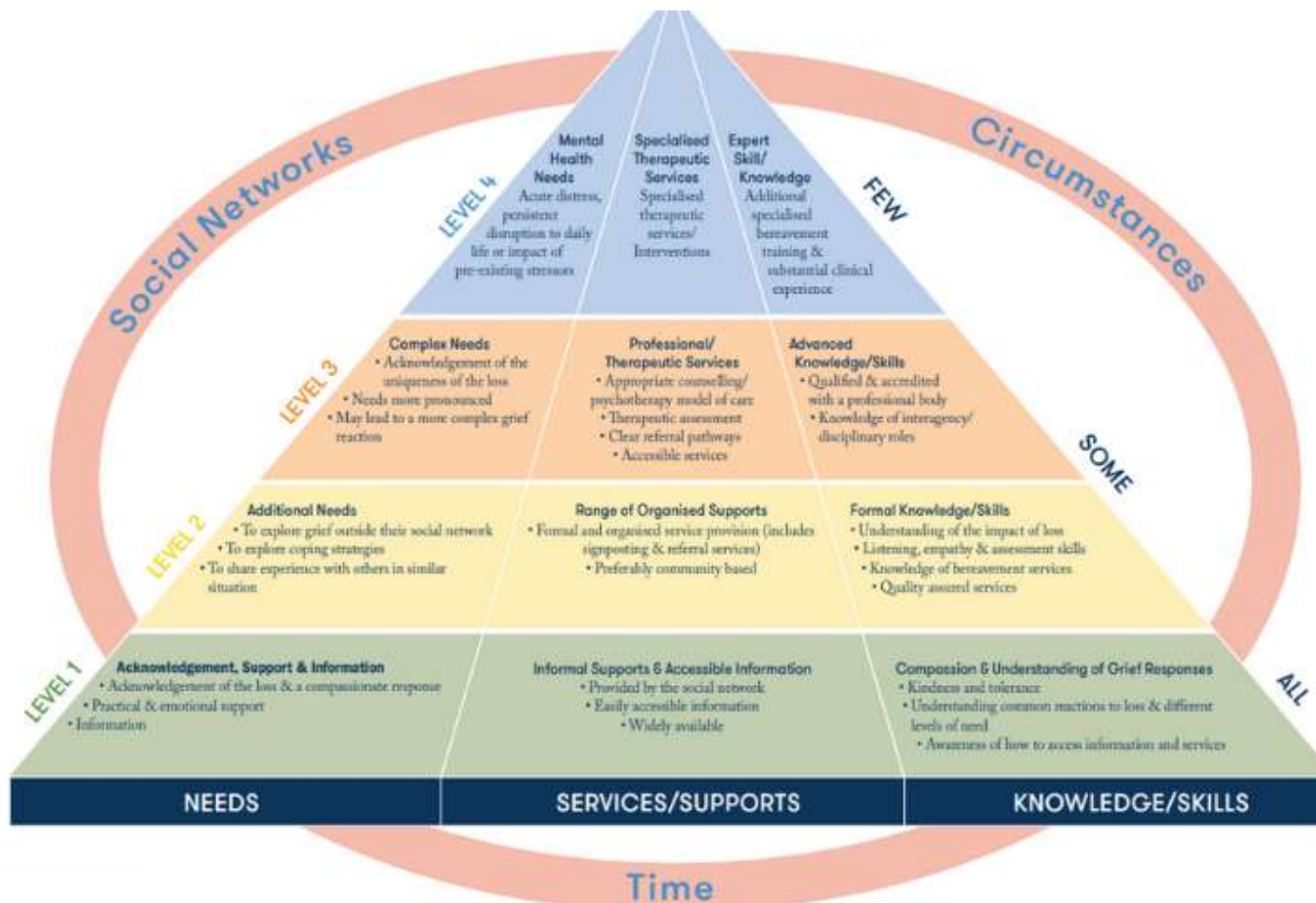


Welcome

An illustration of a diverse group of people from various ethnicities and ages, shown from the chest up, with their hands raised towards a central glowing yellow circle. The background is a warm, orange-toned landscape with stylized trees and foliage. The overall mood is one of unity and community.

GROUNDING
EXERCISE

Grief is a public health issue and a social determinant of health



•A Pyramid Model Of Grief And Bereavement Support


•We adopt a public health model for bereavement which is illustrated as a pyramid. It views bereavement as a natural life event, however one which we have increasingly become removed from, as societies and individuals.

•Hence public education about grief empowers individuals, communities and formal social structures to better understand bereavement and to better support each other (Level 0). This is the basis of the public health model. (100%)

•The public health model next considers accurate information, support from family, social and care networks as the first level of bereavement support (Level 1). (60-100%)

•A range of identifiable risk factors mean some bereaved people will benefit from more organized support, for example, peer-led groups, psycho-education in community settings (Level 2). (approx. 30%)

•Smaller proportions of bereaved people with additional stressors and disruptions to their grief will require specialist therapeutic responses (Level 3). (approx. 10%.)



The Paradox of Grief: Universal yet Individual

Grief is...

- A normal, expected and natural response to loss
- Not only an emotion; includes physical, behavioral, cognitive, social and spiritual reactions
- A meaningful attachment to someone or something that is broken
- Present during any time of change...even during our happiest moments

A life-long journey

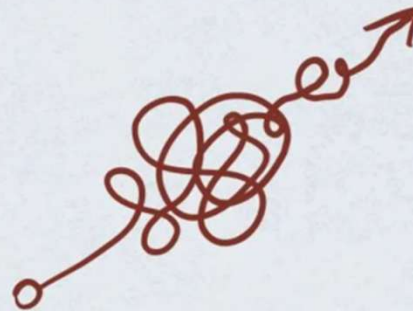
Grief is not a problem to be solved

Stages of Grief

The roadmap you expected:



The road you got:



Loss Oriented	Everyday life experience	Restoration Oriented
Grief work		Attending to life changes
Intrusion of grief		Doing new things
Relinquishing-continuing-relocating bonds/ties		Distraction from grief
Denial/avoidance of restoration changes		Denial/avoidance of grief
		New roles/identities/relationships
	Oscillation	

Myths About Grief

- Grief is linear (5+ stages are a fallacy)
- Grief is time limited
- Time heals all wounds
- Grief is mostly sadness
- I just need to push past my grief
- Talking about the person who died will make things worse

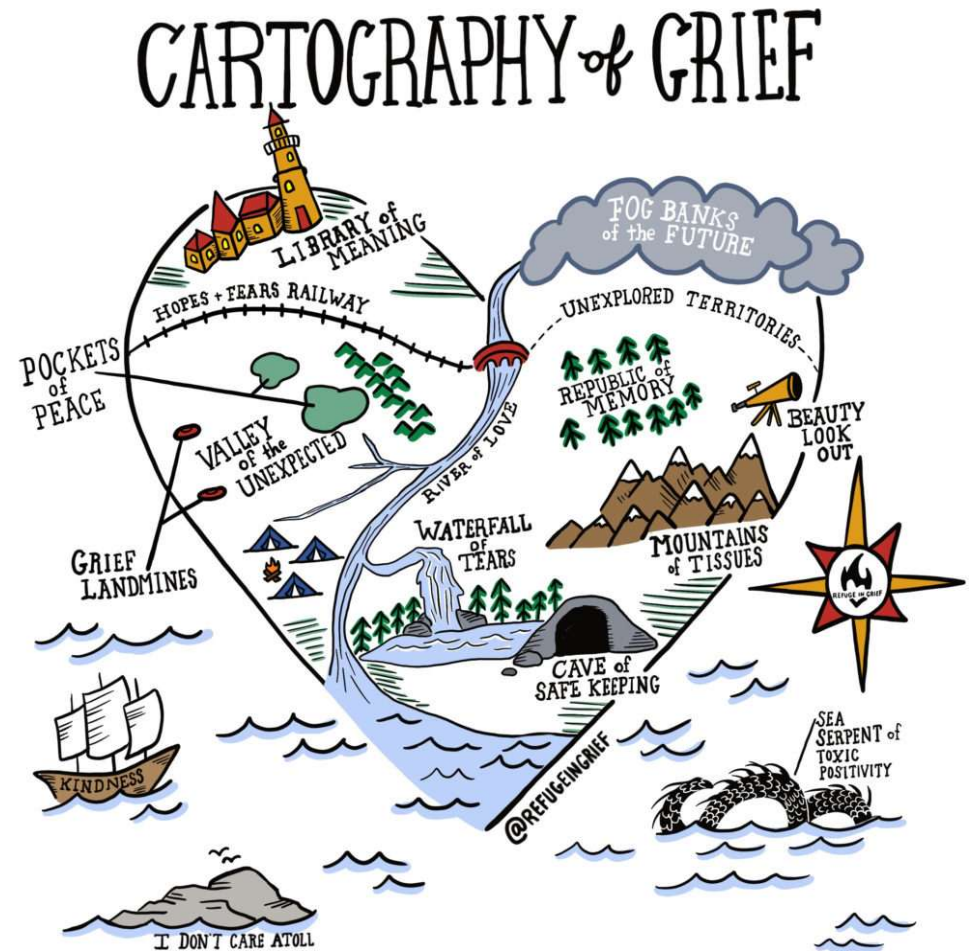
**THERE IS NOT A REASON FOR EVERYTHING.
NOT EVERY LOSS CAN BE TRANSFORMED
INTO SOMETHING USEFUL. THINGS
HAPPEN THAT DO NOT HAVE A SILVER
LINING. WE HAVE TO START TELLING
THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS KIND OF PAIN.
ABOUT GRIEF, ABOUT LOVE, ABOUT LOSS.**

-MEGAN DEVINE

The Grief Experience Includes, but are Not Limited to:

- **Emotions:** sadness, confusion, anger, and guilt
- **Mental Reactions:** forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, preoccupation with the loss
- **Physical Reactions:** Fatigue, difficulty sleeping, aches and pains, change in appetite
- **Spiritual Reactions:** May change worldview, challenge or strengthen beliefs, question purpose in life
- **Social Reactions:** Relationships may change, you may lose some connections and gain others

Supporting a friend through grief involves recognizing these struggles and being present for them during challenging times.



Different Reactions and Coping Mechanisms

Individual Grieving Styles – Intuitive vs. Instrumental vs. Blended

Grief is a personal journey, and individuals may have varying styles of coping with their emotions, from open expression to silence.

Importance of Understanding

Recognizing that each person's grief is unique is essential for offering the right support and empathy during tough times.

Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms vary; some may involve talking with friends while others prefer solitude, art, or nature for healing.



Grieving Styles



Intuitive Grief

- Experienced as waves of emotion
- Expression mirrors inner feelings and emotions
- More feeling than thinking
- Focused on exploring and expressing feelings and processing emotions

Instrumental Grief

- Experienced in more physical or cognitive ways
- Expression is more physical, cognitive or behavioural
- More thinking than feeling
- Focused on doing and more actively responding to grief

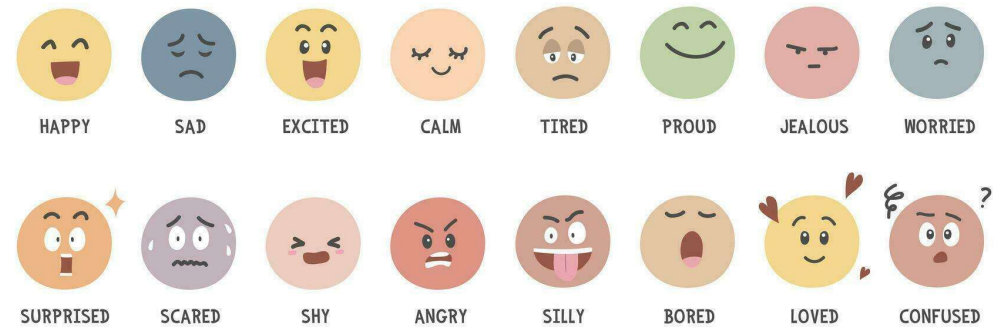
based on work by Terry Martin & Kenneth Doka

www.whatsyourgrief.com

Individual Variations in Grief Responses



IT IS **OKAY** TO FEEL



Types of Grief



Normal Grief

Including Inhibited Grief, Masked Grief and Delayed Grief



Complicated Grief

or prolonged grief characterized by long-lasting & severe emotional reactions.



Chronic Grief

Can last for years, often related to traumatic loss



Anticipatory Grief

Happens before the loss occurs often during a terminal illness



Secondary Loss

Occurs when the bereaved experiences additional losses.



Absent Grief

When the person is in total denial about their loss. Not able to admit they've experienced loss.



Cumulative Grief

Can result from multiple losses over a short time period.



Disenfranchised Loss

Occurs when society does not recognize or acknowledge the value of the loss.



Grief Bursts

- Can be activated by something big or small
- Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, places, other people
- Songs, items (car, piece of clothing, box of cereal, etc.) smells, a picture
- Picking up the phone to call or text them and realizing that you can't
- Crying when something wonderful happens because you can't share it with them



Culture and Tradition



Culture and tradition play an important role in the experience of grief. Cultural beliefs, norms, expectations and practices can influence the bereaved person's behavior.

- Ask what support the family is open to:
 - Can you tell me how your family and your culture recognize and cope with the death of a family member?
 - Is this what you would like to see followed at this time? Can you help me understand how I can best be of help to you and your family?
- Be conscious of assumptions regarding culture and traditions.
- Approach the family with an open mind and heart.
- It's important to recognize that traditions, rituals, and cultural practices may vary even amongst members of the same family/community (i.e. expression of grief, sharing private information, speaking the deceased person's name)

What to Say and What Not to Say

Expression of Sympathy	Flip the Script
The holidays must be so hard for you.	I'm so happy to see you. I know sometimes the holidays can be hard after someone dies.
I'm sorry for your loss.	I know there are no words to make it better. Just know that I'm here and want to support you however I can.
I completely get what you're going through.	Grief is different for everyone. What has it been like for you?
Shouldn't you be over grieving by now? The death happened a while ago.	How is your grief feeling right now?
You need to be strong.	You might feel like you need to be strong, but you don't have to be with me.
I heard your [person] died. I'm sorry to hear that. I hope you are doing okay.	I know your [person] died. I want you to know you can talk to me about this if you want to. I care about you and want to support you.

How are you?	I have been thinking about you. I wanted to check in and see how you are doing.
Your [person] wouldn't want you to be sad.	It is okay that you are feeling sad. We can talk about it if you want.
You must be so sad and really miss your person.	I don't know what you're going through, but I want to listen if you want to share.
I bet this time of year is hard for you.	Holidays can be hard after someone dies. How are you feeling about [holiday, anniversary, birthday]?
They're in a better place / Everything happens for a reason / At least they're no longer in pain.	When people die they can leave a space in our life. What's something that's comforting right now?
Tell me how they died.	Tell me about them.
Loved One	Your Person
Use of stigmatized language such as, I heard your person committed suicide / died of an overdose.	I was sorry to learn that your person died.
Parents Family / Families he and/or she, brothers and/or sisters	Caregivers / Trusted Adults Chosen family / families they and/or them, siblings

THE SECOND HALF OF
THE SENTENCE



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Talking about death



Children

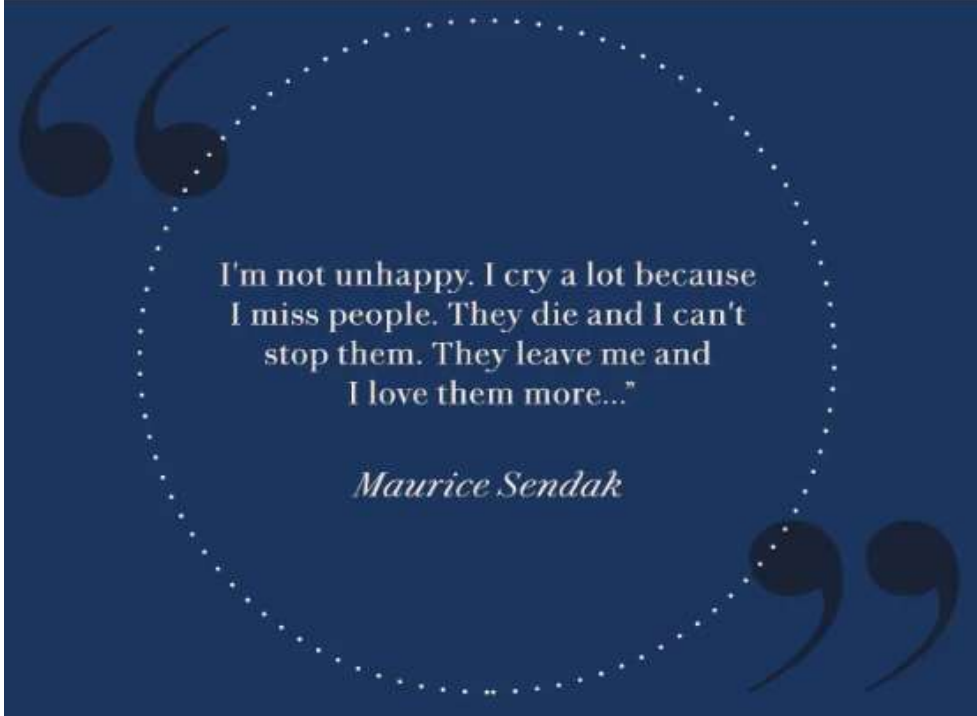
- Create a safe space for children to talk or ask questions and be at their level (sit, kneel, etc.)
- Use direct language such as dead, died, death
- Ask clarifying questions to really understand what they are asking
- Provide age or developmentally appropriate
- They can only engage in a conversation for a few moments at a time



Adults and Community

- Use direct language such as dead, died, death
- Express empathy and acknowledge the grief and pain of family and friends
- Provide necessary information including notification of death and funeral or memorial arrangements
- Be respectful of family's preferences and cultural traditions
- If applicable provide support resources

How to Be with Someone who is Grieving?



I'm not unhappy. I cry a lot because
I miss people. They die and I can't
stop them. They leave me and
I love them more..."

Maurice Sendak

- The Power of Presence
- Sharing Silence
- Avoid Judgement
- Listening
- Asking about their person
- Encouraging Expression
- Sharing stories and memories
- Be a companion

Tenets of Companioning the Bereaved

Companioning is about...

1. Being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking the pain away.
2. Going to the wilderness of the with another human being
3. Honoring the spirit
4. Listening with the heart
5. Bearing witness to the struggles of others
6. Walking alongside
7. Discovering the gifts of sacred silence
8. Being still
9. Respecting disorder and confusion
10. Learning from others
11. Compassionate curiosity

DR. ALAN D. WOLFELT'S Tenets of Companioning the Bereaved

Grief is not an illness; it is the natural and necessary sequel to love. Unlike the medical model of grief care, the companioning model does not seek to treat or cure but rather bear witness, learn, and accompany. Grievers are the experts of their own experience. Companions offer a safe space, an open heart, affirmation, and hope.

Companioning is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.

Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

Companioning is about honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.

Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.

Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about judging or directing these struggles.

Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.

Companioning is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it is not about filling up every moment with words.

Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.

Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.

Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.

Companioning is about compassionate curiosity; it is not about expertise.

Center for Loss
& Life Transition®
www.centerforloss.com

THE RABBIT LISTENED

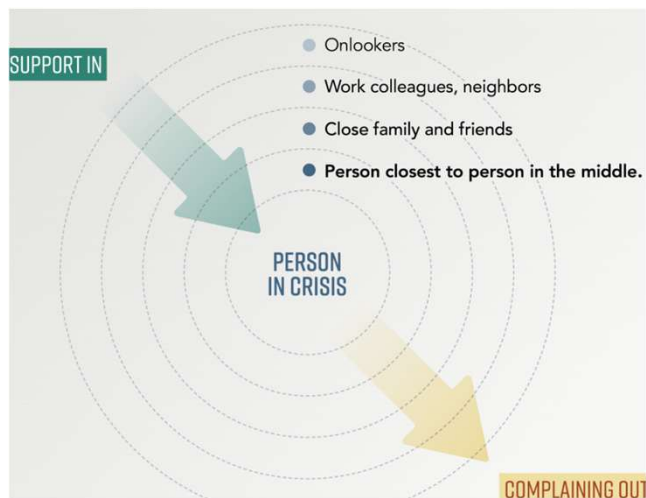
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Rabbit Listened

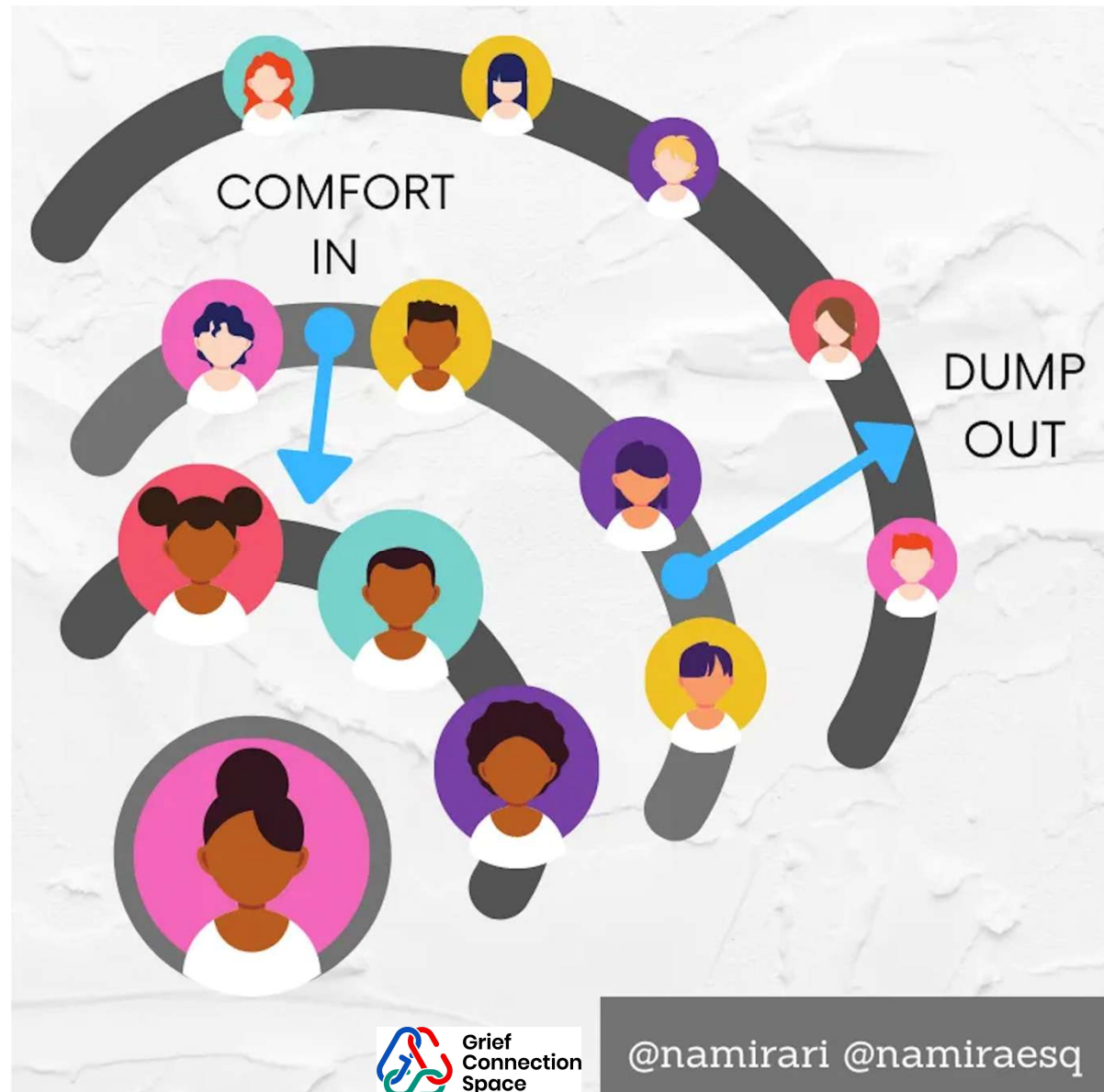
Ring theory

Like a pebble dropped into a pond, circles radiate outward from the center of the situation. Which circle are you in?



Worksheet:

<https://speakinggrief.org/assets/uploads/documents/speaking-grief-ring-theory-worksheet.pdf>



Offering or Receiving Support

HOW CAN WE HELP? OPTIONS LIST



Grief
Connection
Space



Support Provider- Name: Email: Phone:

- I can offer the following support (please check options below).

Support Recipient - Name: Email: Phone:

- I am open to someone providing support (please check options below):

MEALS OR FOOD PREP

- ☐ Bring Ready To Eat Meals
- ☐ Bring frozen/eat later meals
- ☐ Dine with person or family at restaurant
- ☐ Offer to come over and eat with them
- ☐ Invite them to a meal in your home
- ☐ Gift cards for preferred restaurants:
- ☐ Bring disposable cups, plates, cutlery

CHORES

- ☐ Take trash and recycling to and/or from curb
- ☐ Pet care: feed, walk, or clean up after them
- ☐ Bring trash/recycling bins to/ from curb
- ☐ Mow lawn
- ☐ Snow removal - Sidewalks and/or driveway

HELP WITH CHILDREN

- ☐ Take kids to school
- ☐ Bring kids home from school
- ☐ Take kids to extracurriculars
- ☐ Babysitting
- ☐ Playdates

CLEANING HOUSE

- ☐ Laundry
- ☐ Help with dishes
- ☐ Help with general cleaning and straightening

PAPERWORK

- ☐ Assistance with gathering paperwork
- ☐ Calling necessary organizations
- ☐ Writing thank you notes /
- ☐ acknowledgements
- ☐ Assistance writing obituary or services

SELF CARE

- ☐ Join me for a walk or movement activity
- ☐ I would appreciate religious/spiritual companionship
- ☐ Body Doubling or silent support

griefconnectionspace.com

OFFER CONCRETE HELP

"I would love to..."

take out your recycling

clean your house

mow your lawn

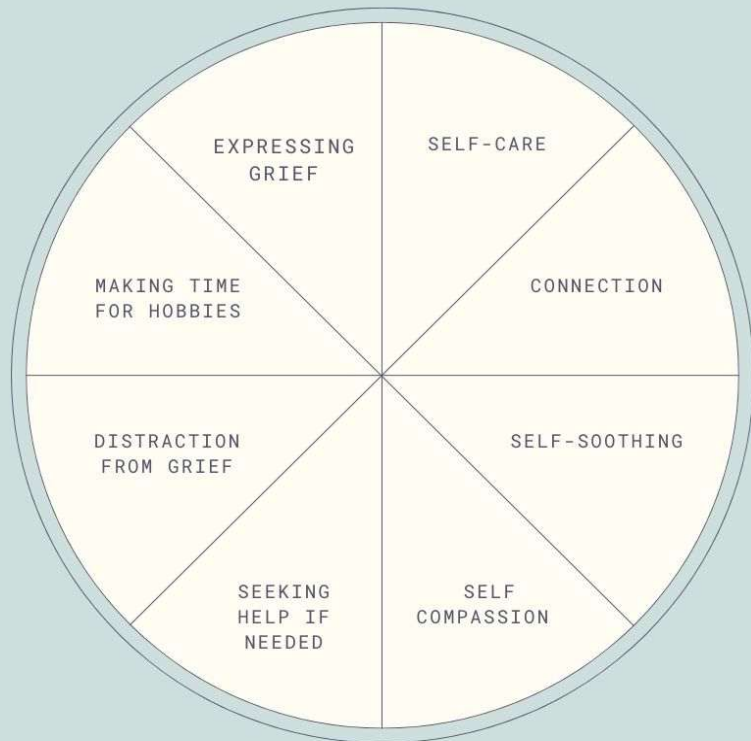
watch your kids for the afternoon



...would that be ok with you?"

ASK FIRST

THE COPING WHEEL



Importance of Self-Care

- Practice self-care and prioritize your emotional needs
- Self-care is NOT feeling sorry for yourself

Connect with supportive friends and family members

Expression:

- Talking about your loss
- Writing, Art-Making, Physical Activity
- Singing, Praying, Rituals

Taking a Break from Grief:

- Hobby (new or old)
- Games, Puzzles, Crafts
- Books, Art, Movies, Music
- Spending Time Outdoors

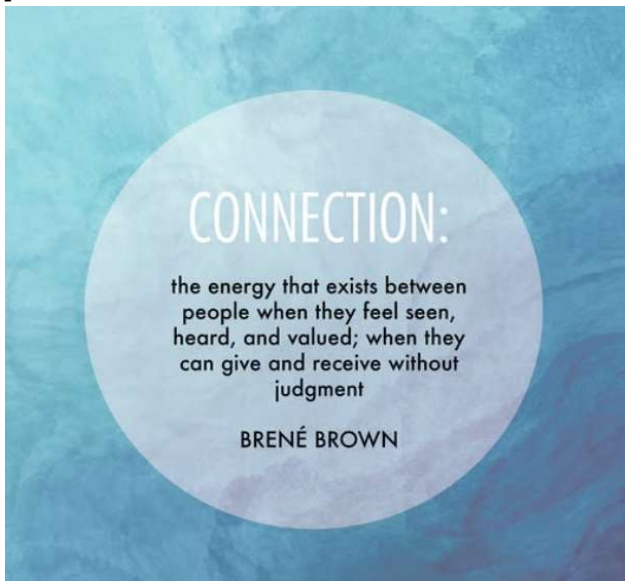
Self-Soothing: What brings you comfort? What brings you joy?

Plan for challenging situations and events:

- Develop a new ritual/routine
- Allow yourself time and space to take a break
- Bring a supportive person

Importance of Connection

- **Aim for Regular Communication-**
no response required
- **Impact of Simple Messages**
- **Remembering Important Dates
and Anniversaries**
- **Holding Space versus Filling
Space**



Professional Help

Risk Factors include:

- Prior Trauma or significant loss(es)
- Lack of Support System
- Multiple Life stressors
- Nature of Death (unexpected, traumatic, etc.)
- Nature of relationship (especially close, estranged)
- Past History of Depression, PTSD or other mental health diagnosis

Options include:

- Individual Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Support Groups



Source: Dougy Center

Supporting Through Memorial and Funeral Planning



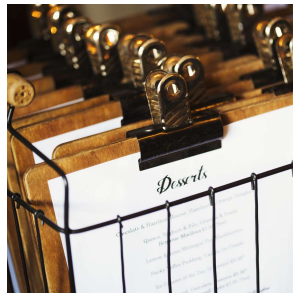
Alleviating Stress

Helping with memorial planning can reduce the emotional burden on grieving individuals during a difficult time.



Offering Support

Being present and offering logistical assistance can provide much-needed comfort and reassurance to those who are grieving.



Logistics Assistance

Assisting with the logistical aspects of memorial planning can help families focus on their emotional needs during a challenging time.

Children -

Resources

Grief and Bereavement Resources

Family Support

Buddy's Place, a Program of Pillars Community Health - Countryside, IL <http://www.pillarscommunityhealth.org>
Good Mourning/Rainbow Hospice Mt. Prospect 847-685-9900 <http://www.rainbowhospice.org>
Willow House Bannockburn/Libertyville/Arlington Heights 847-236-9300 <http://www.willowhouse.org>
Heartlinks Grief Center Belleville, Illinois <https://myheartlinks.com>
Fox Valley Hands of Hope, Geneva, IL <https://www.fvhh.net>
Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care, Joliet, IL <http://www.lightways.org>

Child Loss

Compassionate Friends/Local Chapters Waukegan/Lake Villa 630-990-0010 www.compassionatefriends.org
Children's Wisconsin Milwaukee 414-266-2995 griefsupport@chw.org
Faith's Lodge www.faithslodge.org
Heartlight/Lurie Children's Hospital Chicago 312-227-3930 www.luriechildrens.org
Luella's Lodge Family Bereavement Retreat Center <https://www.luellaslodge.org/>

Miscarriage/Infant Loss

Beyond the Baby Blues In person/Virtual www.beyondthebabyblues.org
National Share Virtual www.nationalshare.org
Northwest Suburban Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support Group Arlington Heights 847-618-8415
Post-Partum Depression Hotline 1-800-944-4773
Return to Zero Virtual www.rtzhope.org
Sharing Hope/Edward-Elmhurst Naperville, Elmhurst Susan.Villa@EEHealth.org
Star Legacy Virtual 952.715.7731 x 716 www.starlegacyfoundation.org
Sudden Infant Death/Alliance of Illinois 800-432-7437 www.sidsillinois.org



These resources for informational purposes only and GCS does not specifically endorse any of them.



Grief and Bereavement Resources

Suicide Loss Support:

Alliance of Hope: Provides online forums and resources tailored for survivors of suicide loss <https://allianceofhope.org>
LOSS (Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide): Operated by the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago. LOSS offers counseling, group meetings, and online resources for adults and children grieving a loss to suicide. Contact: (312) 655-7283.
JCFS Chicago: Support for individuals, couples, and families dealing with suicide loss as well as groups. Contact: (855) 275-5237
Afsp (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention): Offers a searchable database of local and virtual support groups
NAMI: Connect with your local NAMI Illinois affiliate for more information. Near west suburbs: www.namimetsub.org
SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education): Offers directories and support group information nationwide.
Prevention-based:
Elyssa's Mission Northbrook 847-697-9181
Erika's Lighthouse Winnetka 847-386-6481
Hope for the Day www.hftd.org

Homicide Support:

Chicago Survivors Cook County 877-863-6338 www.chicagosurvivors.org
Kids Above All Chicago, Elgin, Naperville, Waukegan www.kidsaboveall.org
Family Advocacy Program Joliet E-mail: ftaprogram@comcast.net
Illinois States Attorney Statewide www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims
Parents of Murdered Children Multiple chapters 888-818-POMC/773-660-9659 www.pomc.org
Trauma Recovery Center/Advocate 708-346-7300

Overdose/Substance Use Death:

GRASP/Grief Recovery After Substance Passing Local Chapters grasphep.org 847-275-7510
HERO/Heroin Epidemic Relief Organization Local Chapters www.theherofoundation.org/grief.php 708-557-8394
Live4Lali Arlington Heights & Virtual 844.584.5254 x801



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was goodbye. ~ A generous soul gave another life. ~ Stillborn baby, born still, still born. ~ Husband and son taken together. Shattered. ~ Why will he not wake up. ~ Ran over him and our hearts! ~ Everyone changed after he went away. ~ This life doesn't work without him. ~ We didn't live happily ever after. ~ Nine months along, both are gone. ~ I thought she would get old. ~ Suffered too long, is finally free. ~ The silent delivery room broke me. ~ Stepping towards the train gone forever. ~ Ordinary day, two breaths, heaven bound. ~ A week in my arms, forever in my heart. ~ Will she one day be forgotten? ~ Everything was good, until it wasn't. ~ I still search for you everywhere. ~ Lost and no map to follow. ~ Ghosts haunt me. ~ Sorry please. ~ I didn't know you were sick. ~ Sorry we did everything we could. ~ His weight killed him...and me. ~ Her last breath took mine away. ~ Waiting for the shoe to drop. ~ Loved him unconditionally until the end. ~ You lied to me...you died. ~ He always French-plaited my hair. ~ My courage grows while honoring him. ~ Cancer took everything except her faith. ~ Tossled, funny, loved life...smash, dead. ~ I held her and sang blessings. ~ He moved on into God's hands. ~ Deep gratitude for every common moment. ~ Your absence is my constant companion. ~ I cannot do this without you. ~ Didn't understand all that she sacrificed. ~ Went to work, never came home. ~ She was just eighteen years old. ~ Joy, unknown, fighting, relapse, forever 7 ~ Proudly roasting Thanksgiving

A few minutes to think about a loss in your life and how to capture it in a few words

- Now I make my own coffee
- I Miss You I Miss You
- Empty Slippers Waiting Under the Dresser
- Empty chair, no pumpkin pie
- The lamp looks weird without you

Self-reflection

- How is grief present in your life?
- How do you acknowledge your grief?
- What do you need to grieve?
- Are you holding others grief and if so, how are you releasing it into the world?
- What type(s) of grief have you/are you experiencing?
 - Ambiguous
 - Grief by proxy
 - Disenfranchised
 - Cumulative
 - Collective
 - Secondary Losses



Questions?



Thank you!



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hello@GriefConnectionSpace.com



@GriefConnectionSpace