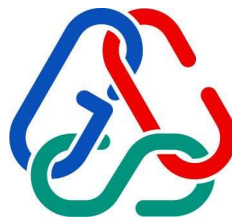


# Navigating Grief Associated with Death & Non-Death Losses



**Grief  
Connection  
Space**

1



**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 and is on the Clinical Oversight committee for Hope for the Day. Additionally, she works as a staff therapist at Bridgepoint Psychology Center in Chicago, Illinois.

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 and is LCPC-eligible.

Michelle identifies as a cisgender, straight, middle-aged, English-speaking white woman. These aspects of my identity shape how I move through the world, and I recognize the privileges and perspectives that come with them. As a facilitator, I'm committed to creating inclusive, respectful spaces where a range of voices and lived experiences are centered and valued.



**Grief  
Connection  
Space**

At Grief Connection Space, LLC, we specialize in partnering to create grief informed communities through workshop facilitation, presentations, and community education.

Connect with us at [www.griefconnectionspace.com](http://www.griefconnectionspace.com)



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# Objectives

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Grief is often associated with death, but in many instances in LGBTQIA communities and individuals, it can manifest in many other non-death losses as well. These losses include the loss of relationships, identity shifts, societal exclusion, and cultural displacement.

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Identify the unique grief experiences of individuals and communities, examining topics such as death loss, family estrangement, secondary losses, and the intersectionality of grief with other marginalized identities.

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Through compassionate discussion, and practical insights, participants will learn how to acknowledge and support others through these profound but often unrecognized losses. The session will conclude with a focus on resilience, healing, and the importance of building affirming communities.

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### Grief Humility

*You will make mistakes.*

Sometimes,

**I don't know what to say**

is the best thing you *can* say.

- Be humble
- Acknowledge mistakes
- It is our responsibility to educate ourselves, not the grievers
- Grief is exhausting

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary."


Fred Rogers

### Grief Advocacy:

Bringing grief into the foreground and embedding grief-informed practices into our professional work.



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## 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**

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## Myths About Grief

- Grief is a problem to solve
- 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.**

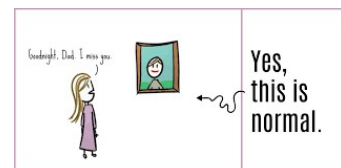
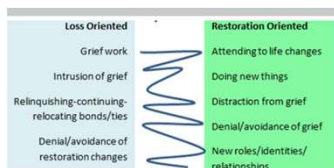
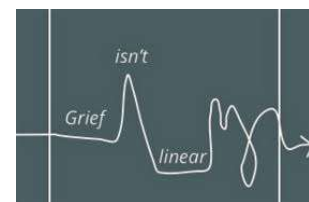
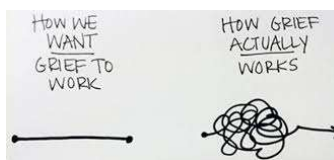
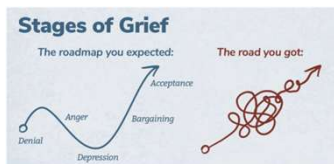
-MEGAN DEVINE



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## How grief really looks

- ***We now know... grief does NOT occur in stages***

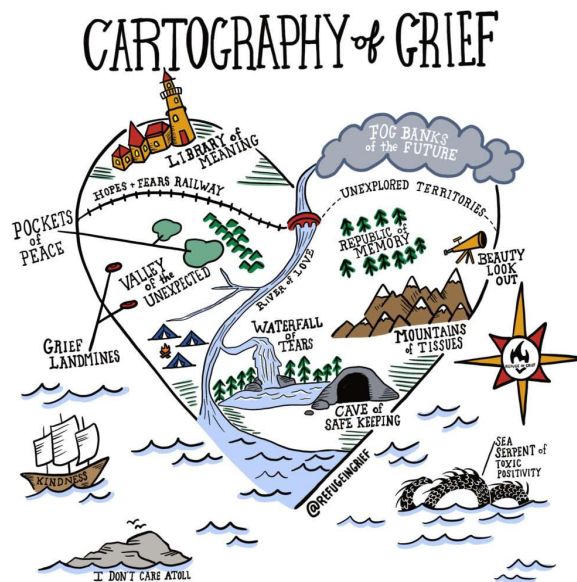


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The Grief Experience Includes, but are Not Limited to:

- **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.

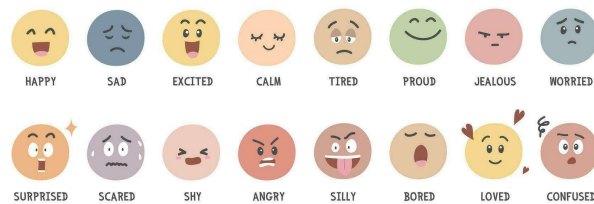


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## Individual Variations in Grief Responses



IT IS **OKAY** TO FEEL



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## 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 Aarssen & Kenneth Doka

www.wholegrief.com



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## Cultural Diversity in Grief: Key Factors to Consider

### Cultural Attitudes Toward Grief

- Different cultures have distinct beliefs about how grief should be expressed.
- Some cultures may encourage outward displays of emotion (e.g., wailing, communal mourning), while others may value stoicism and quiet reflection.

### Rituals and Ceremonies

- Grief often involves rituals or ceremonies that help individuals process loss and honor the deceased.
  - Mexican culture: The Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) is a celebration of deceased loved ones, with offerings and communal remembrance.
  - Jewish culture: Shiva, a period of mourning where the family and friends gather for reflection and support.
  - Hindu culture: Cremation rituals and the journey of the soul are central to the grieving process, with ceremonies often lasting several days.

### Grief and Identity in LGBTQ+ Communities

- For LGBTQ+ individuals, cultural stigma and family rejection can create complex grief experiences, particularly if they are estranged from their families or community.
- Some may seek solace in chosen family and LGBTQ+ support networks, particularly in environments where they may be marginalized or misunderstood.
- Cultural expectations in conservative communities may create feelings of silencing or invisibility, adding layers to the grief experience.

### Gender and Grief

- In many cultures, grief may be tied to gender roles, affecting how individuals are expected to express sorrow.

### Spiritual Beliefs and the Afterlife

- Spirituality and beliefs about the afterlife can significantly influence grief practices.

### Cultural Considerations for Grief Support

- Community support during grief varies widely:
  - In some cultures, there's an expectation for community members to provide active emotional and practical support during mourning.
  - In other cultures, individual mourning may be emphasized, and grief support might be more private.
  - LGBTQ+ communities may rely on chosen family, especially if biological family has rejected or disowned them.

Because this culture has such a skewed idea of how long grief lasts, we don't put a specific date range on "early grief."

**Grief is as individual as love: every life, every path, is unique.**



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## 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.



Suffocated Loss

Ambiguous Loss



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## Disenfranchised and Suffocated Grief in LGBTQ Youth

**Disenfranchised grief** refers to the experience of loss that is not recognized, validated, or acknowledged by others—making it difficult for individuals to access support or mourn openly. (Doka)

When resources and support systems are unavailable, youth may be forced to **cope in isolation**, suppress their emotions, or experience what has been termed “**suffocated grief**.”

For **LGBTQ youth**, these experiences of loss may be further complicated by the need to explain or justify the significance of relationships—such as the death of a **chosen family member**—which may not be fully understood or respected by others.

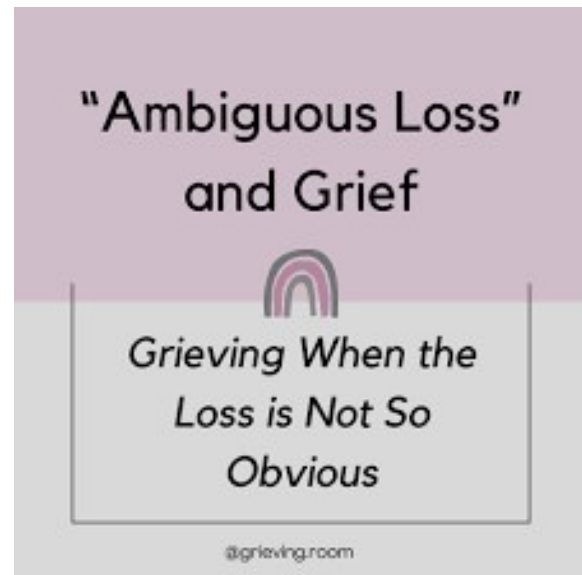
Educators and other support systems are often **unprepared to recognize or respond** to these unique grieving experiences, leaving youth without the care and validation they need. (Bordere, 2016)



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## Ambiguous Loss

- This sense of both psychological and physical presence –absence loss can be described as “ambiguous loss.”
- It can feel as though one is “leaving without goodbye”; yet, at the same time, there is a “good bye without leaving” (Boss, 1999)

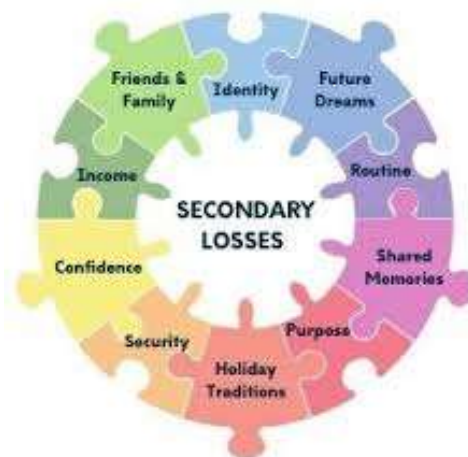


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### *Suffocated Grief:*

A term coined by Dr. Tashel Bordere to explain situations **when normal grief reactions are penalized**.

This is not simply disenfranchised grief, in which grief is unacknowledged. In suffocated grief, a person's grief expression is punished.



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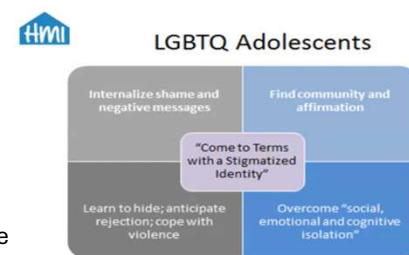
## Non-Death Related Losses That May Occur



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## Loss of Identity

- Disenfranchised Grief
- Systemic barrier to mourning
  - Policies or norms that don't allow for authentic expressive
  - Legitimize relationship (disenfranchisement)
- Non-death losses during identity development
  - Loss of safety, security, privilege as LGBTQ+ identity develops
  - Social oppression, isolation, cultural conflicts, etc. share grief
- Resilient grieving in community
  - Growth, community
- To grow is to lose
  - Holding both can be challenging



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## Losses in Development

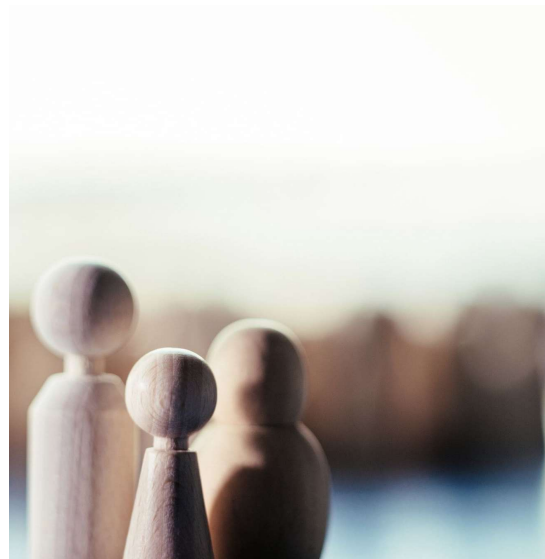
- LGBTQ+ identity development is fluid and lifelong process
- New environments pose new or repeated task for development
  - Coming out in new contexts
  - Shifts in relationship
  - Adjusting
- How do we conceptualize grief when loss is inherent to LGBTQ+ development?



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## Loss of Family

- Long-term impact of family rejection or provisional acceptance (you can be in this family as long as you...)
- Imbalance in family acceptance (dad is cool, mom is not ok or parents don't know but the sibling does)
- Burden of having caused family stress or the internalization of the idea that one is at fault for current family dynamics
- LGBTQ youth can be the lightning rod for abuse, feel responsible to keep other siblings safe and say silent about abuse.
- Navigating parents' grief process/being ahead of parents in this process
- Familial reactions to coming out/rejection
- Projections of anticipated "story of one's life."
- Peer/friend related loss and community loss of the supports/friends they thought they had



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## Loss of Assumptive World

### Global Assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992)

1. the world is benevolent
2. the world is meaningful
3. the self is worthy

### Local Assumptions (Rando, 1993)

- Individual worldview

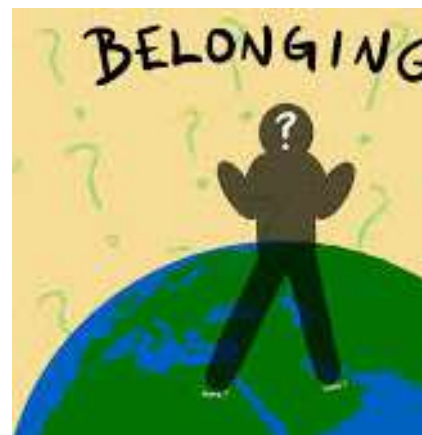
### Shattering events challenge our assumptions

- Rebuilding the assumptive world required integrating shattering events or traumatic experiences into worldview

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## Loss of Community Belonging

- Peer group/ youth groups
- Organizations / clubs
- Teams/Sports
- Religious /Spirituality Affiliations
- Segregated camps or schools including dorms



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## Impact of Intersectionality

- An intersectional lens helps us understand how an individual's multiple identities—such as race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation—overlap and interact, often contributing to experiences of systemic oppression and discrimination.
- For LGBTQ youth of color, the intersection of racial or religious identity with sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) can create additional layers of tension, both within their families and internally. These challenges often occur at higher levels than those experienced by their white LGBTQ peers.



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## Community Level Bereavement

LGBTQ individuals experience disproportionately high rates of violence, hate crimes, and systemic discrimination.

These experiences often lead to internalized distress, including depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use.

Rejection and discrimination can also contribute to homelessness and engagement in high-risk behaviors, increasing vulnerability to serious health concerns such as HIV/AIDS.

The LGBTQ community has been disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, as a result, has faced ongoing collective grief and its associated psychological impacts.



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# Addressing Community Level Bereavement

- “Healing Centered Engagement” as an approach
  - Trauma is not only individual, but also experienced collectively and needs to collective healing
  - Healing comes from awareness and actions that address the conditions that created the trauma to in the first place
  - Well-being comes from participating in transforming the root causes of the harm
  - Participation in activism gives young people control and power over their own lives and contributes to overall well being, hopefulness and optimism Focus on the well-being we want (rather than symptoms we want to suppress), based in positive psychology.



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## Case Examples

### JORDAN

- Jordan (13) recently came out as transgender to their parents. With support and encouragement at home, Jordan has begun to socially transition — using a new name, pronouns, and expressing themselves in ways that feel authentic.
- Jordan’s parents are learning alongside them: attending support groups, reading, asking questions, and advocating for their child in school and healthcare settings.
- However, the reaction from the broader community — particularly from other parents — has been mixed.

### ALEX

- Alex (19), a genderqueer student, moves from a supportive high school community to a conservative college town.
- In high school, Alex was part of a supportive LGBTQ+ community and felt seen and validated.
- Alex is excited about college but anxious about how they will be accepted in a more conservative environment.

### SARAH

- Sarah (28) identifies as bisexual and works as a graphic designer in a suburb of a large city.
- Sarah was raised in a small, conservative town where her sexuality was often silenced or dismissed.
- After moving to the suburb of a big city with good proximity to city life, Sarah initially felt relief and excitement, hoping to find a more accepting community.

### ELISE

- Elise is a middle-aged lesbian woman in her early 50s living in an urban setting with her and her partner’s two children.
- A respected parent and active member of her local neighborhood
- Elise was once part of a visible and engaged family unit.
- Her wife, Mara, died away last year after a respiratory illness.
- Elise is working to settle Mara’s estate and is experiencing many microaggressions and assumptions.



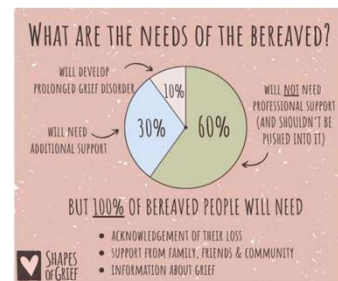
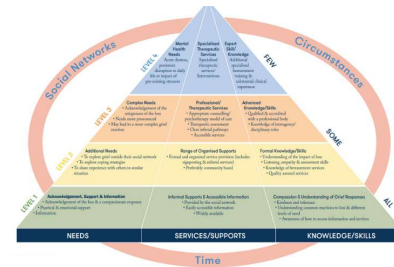
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## Grief is a public health issue and a social determinant of health

### 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%.)



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## Current Bereavement Theories

### Dual Process Model

- Cannot sit in our grief 24/7
- Go back and forth, toward and away from coping
- Pendulum swings from grief work to reorientation

### Attachment Theory

- All humans need safety & security
- Affectional bonds keep us connected
- Emotional reaction when bonds are broken

### 4 Tasks of Mourning

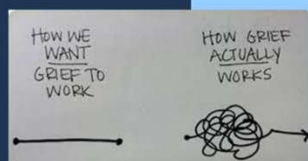
- Accept reality of loss
- Process the pain of grief
- Adjust to environment where deceased is missing
- Find an enduring connection while continuing to live

### Meaning Reconstruction

- Bereaved question basic assumptions of the world
- Create stories to find meaning in death
- Allows the bereaved to incorporate loss into their life story

### Continuing Bonds

- Common in nearly all grief models
- Bereaved do not sever ties with their loved one
- Continue their bonds through writing, ritual, celebration, including them in daily life

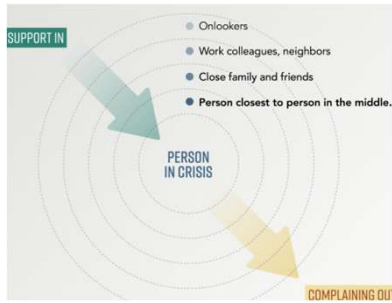


(Rubel, 2020)

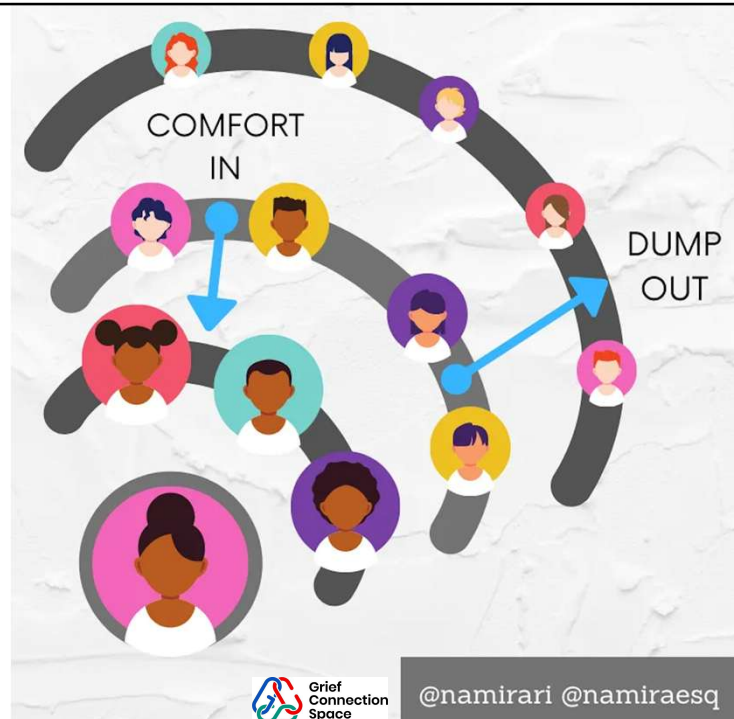
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## Ring theory

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



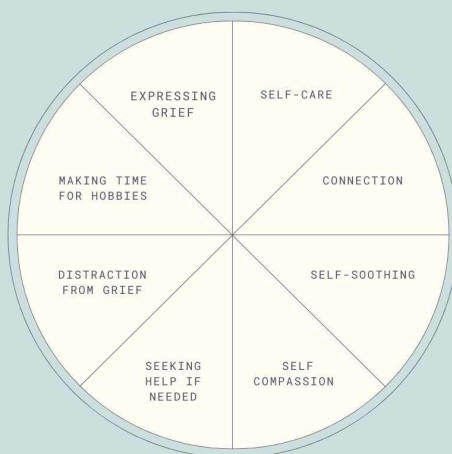
Worksheet:  
<https://speakinggrief.org/assets/uploads/documents/speaking-grief-ring-theory-worksheet.pdf>



@namirari @namiraesq

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## 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



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## Best Practices

- Create a safe, empathetic affirming space or working alliance
- Recognize and attend to the range of diversity challenges and minority experiences that might face LGBTQ+ youth / clients
- Consider history of social stigma and institutional discrimination
- Maintain awareness of vulnerability of health problems, physical impairment, social isolation, depression, multiple losses, discriminatory impact of ageism or sexism for lesbian woman.
- Awareness of the social or familial pressures to live a “heteronormative lifestyle” contributing to a sense of social invisibility
- Awareness of the multiple layers of minority status and marginalization that might contribute to internalized oppression (internalized homophobia, transphobia, sexism).
- Family – who is family? People get to define “family”



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## Acknowledging Your Journey

- 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
  - Disenfranchised
  - Cumulative
  - Collective
  - Secondary Losses

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 or being led.

Companioning means discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.

Companioning the bereaved 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 curiosity; it is not about expertise.

- Alan Wolfelt

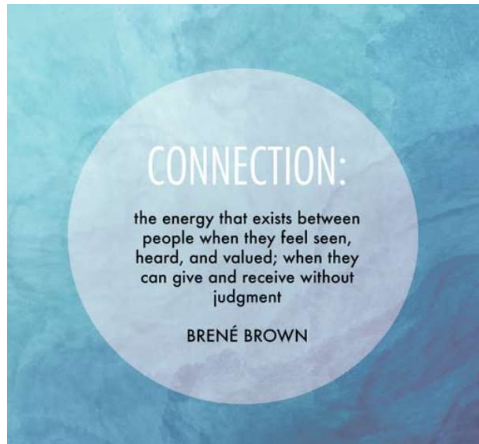
### Companioning is about...

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



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## Importance of Connection



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## Rabbit Listened



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## What helps?

Listening,  
accepting, and  
caring.

Encouraging safe  
physical  
expression.

Reflecting back to  
the person what  
they are  
saying/doing.

Modify  
expectations with  
their input.

Reassuring the  
person, the death  
was not their  
fault.

Referring to  
supports or  
therapy, as  
needed.

Believe in the  
return to wellness  
for the child even  
if they cannot.

Celebrate the  
steps towards  
healing.

Be aware of our  
own grief as  
helpers.

Allow for "time  
out" from grief.



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## Preparing Yourself ... Self reflection

What are the phrases that you  
use to describe death? Do you  
use the word, "died" or do you  
use euphemisms like, "passed  
away" or "lost"?

Examine your own experiences  
with death as a child, an  
adolescent, and as an adult.  
Share your reactions and those  
of the people around you.

Consider the ways your family  
of origin responded to death:  
was it discussed openly, hidden  
from children, something that  
was never a topic of  
conversation?

Do you remember your first  
experience with a funeral?  
What thoughts and feelings  
come to mind?

When you think about attending  
a funeral now, what thoughts  
and feelings does it create?

Discuss the ways that you have  
responded to death in your life.  
Is it similar or different from the  
way you were raised?

Do you belong to a social,  
religious, or cultural group that  
provides specific rituals in  
coping with a death? What are  
they? What do you know about  
other groups' responses to  
death?

How do you respond to  
someone who has experienced  
a death in the family?

What would you tell those close  
to you about death and  
grieving? How is this different  
than your conversation with  
students and/or others?

What are the feelings that come  
to mind when you think about  
death?


How would you describe a  
"perfect death"? Would you be  
able to accept other views?



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HOW TO OFFER SUPPORT	CHILD GRIEF IN THE CLASSROOM	THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT
WHY AM I TALKING?	GRIEF IS AN EXPERIENCE, NOT A PROCESS	YOUR GOAL AS A SUPPORT PERSON


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