



LightsOut

Making Grief Easier

Background Paper

The Lived Experience & Literature informing
Grief Education as a
Personal Development Program

Disclaimer

LightsOut incorporates aspects of Lived Experience, Grief Education, and Research, associated with death and grief.

LightsOut aims to empower people's understanding about death, dying and grief by providing personal development tools, educational material, and resources, whilst promoting an open conversation about death in our community.

The intent of LightsOut is for the betterment of society. To the best of the Authors ability, the opinions of others have been duly cited and acknowledged. Anything said or implied in this paper draws on essential research and Lived Experience cited in this area.



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Prepared by Robyn Minty (Master of Public Health) & Bianca Becker (Founder, LightsOut)
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Acknowledgment of Indigenous Culture

The Authors acknowledge all Indigenous peoples who reside across the inhabited continents of Earth. These peoples are "communities, peoples and nations...which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or part of them. At present they form non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as a basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system" (United Nations 2004; Sones et al -Declaration 2010 p.2).

We note that some Indigenous peoples are easily identified, such as the First Nations and Inuit in Canada, the American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States, the Maori in New Zealand, and the Aboriginals in Australia. However, some Indigenous peoples are less visible, and some are not officially recognized by the governments of their countries. Indigenous peoples come from thousands of cultures and are over-represented among the poor and disadvantaged. Overall, their health compares unfavourably with their non-Indigenous counterparts (Gracey & King, 2009 cited by Sones 2010). Bereavement and grief may be overrepresented in their experiences.

We acknowledge that sensitivity must be the lens for all grief educational discussion and that the authors in no way wish to offend nor deny the individual or communities' ability to create their own specific cultural focus on the grief journey. We know that all cultures can enable and assist each other in understanding death and subsequent grieving bereavement.

We hope the information and consequent LightsOut Program will provide a pillar for all peoples of Earth to draw on as tools to additionally support their grief and bereavement experience. We hope for well-being for all peoples. We hope that the anguish of grief can be counteracted by increased awareness about grief skilfulness, which is our motivation to provide discussion and educational resources about grief at this time.

Bianca Becker 2022

About Definitions

For the purpose of reading this paper:

Aboriginal	Refers to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people, Koori nations Australia as well as worldwide Indigenous peoples in context.
Belief/Mind	Interchangeable with soul, spirit, consciousness, energy, or awareness (Chin 2016).

About the Founder

Bianca Becker is the CEO and Founder of LightsOut. LightsOut aims to empower people by increasing their understanding about death, dying and grief. LightsOut provides personal development tools, educational material, resources, promoting an open conversation about death in our community.

Bianca has drawn on her Lived Experience, personal research, and her collaborative partnerships from the grief sector globally to develop LightsOut.

After experiencing complex grief after the deaths of her brother and mother, she found supportive resources scarce. The resulting personal struggles and consequent insights led Bianca to reflect on how little knowledge and understanding she had about death and grief and that this had contributed to her mental health languishing. She wanted to be better prepared as a young person, and so she embarked on her grief education journey.

Bianca has grown to understand how grief skills can empower our reactions to death. Death is rarely taught as a curriculum globally; we rely on learning about grief through the incidental 'teachable moments'. By learning about grief early in life, we can draw on our strengths and build the resilience to face death and bereavement in healthy and more positive and informed ways.

For more information – <https://lightsout.app>

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Foreword

Why the title LightsOut?

The LightsOut branding reflects my personal journey. The word itself relates to death in some ways, without actually using the word "death". It's a middle ground - something that relates to the significance of death while making it approachable. "Lights out" is a slang term for death that's well-known, not offensive, and doesn't beat around the bush.

Similarly, the skeleton in our branding represents death without being scary or overly angelic. A skeleton is something we all have in common, along with the fact that we will all die someday!

Bianca

~



To assist in the Paper's navigation-

Section One & Two explores the current situation about death and grief understanding in our societies.

Section Three & Four explains the concept of reframing Grief as a Skill, what the LightsOut Program stands for and how we can embrace Grief personally.

GLOSSARY

Agency	In social science, agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.
Bereavement	The loss to which the person is trying to adapt and the experience of having lost someone (Chin 2016 p.18).
Culture	The set of beliefs, values, and rules for living that is distinctive to a particular group. Culture is passed down the generations in the complex relationships, knowledge, languages, social organisations, and life experiences that bind diverse individuals and groups together. Culture is a living process (Atkinson, 2020).
Death Education	A variety of educational activities and experiences related to death, embracing such core topics as meanings and attitudes toward death, processes of dying and bereavement, and including care for people affected by death.
Death Denial	“The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man” Ernest Becker, 1973 (p. ix)
Death Phobia	or death anxiety; Death anxiety is as old as humanity. It is defined as a psychological state arising from one's fear of death or being harmed. Encountering situations that lead to anticipation or awareness of dying is known as death anxiety. Higher death anxiety is shown to be able to predict both the existence and severity of mental illnesses Mani et.al, (2022)
Fear	The emotion caused by the anticipation of unhappiness (Engarhos et al., 2013)
Grief	<p>The experience of one who has lost a loved one. It is comprised of thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and physiological changes that vary in pattern and intensity over time (Chin 2016 p.18). Grief can be described as reactive, complex, cumulative, or prolonged.</p> <p>Complicated grief - continuous, prolonged, and intensive and may emerge after experiencing one loss.</p> <p>Cumulative grief – (known as bereavement overload) occurs when multiple losses are simultaneously or close together without appropriate adjustment time (Waldon University, USA).</p>

Indigenous	Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Australians are also used as inclusive terms for the traditional First Peoples in Australia and elsewhere.
Intergenerational	<p>the prefix <i>inter-</i> is from the Latin, meaning <i>between or among, together, or mutually together</i>. Intergenerational trauma is passed down directly from one generation to the next (in all peoples). Transgenerational is trauma transmitted across multiple generations.</p> <p>Individual trauma reverberates across communities but also across the generations. The concept of historic trauma was initially developed in the 1980s by First Nations and Aboriginal peoples in Canada to explain the seeming unending cycle of trauma and despair in their communities. Essentially, the devastating trauma of genocide, loss of culture, and forcible removal from family and communities are all unresolved and become a sort of ‘psychological baggage... continuously being acted out and recreated in contemporary Aboriginal culture’ (Wesley et al., 2004; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008).</p>
Lived Experience	Lived Experience is defined as “personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people” (Chandler et al, 2016, Oxford Dictionary).
Lived Experience of Suicide	People with lived or Living Experience of suicide are those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, been bereaved by suicide or having a loved one who died by suicide, acknowledging that this experience is significantly different, (Suicide prevention Australia, Wayland et al., 2020).
Mourning	Term applied to the process that one goes through in adapting to the death of the person (Chin 2016 p.18).
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - a mental health condition that develops following a traumatic event characterised by intrusive thoughts about the incident, recurrent distress/anxiety, flashback, and avoidance of similar situations; grief can be associated with it.
Resilience	<p>Ability to go on despite difficult life experiences.</p> <p>Resilience is a skill set that allows individuals the capacity to overcome the effects of adversity (Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020). Building resilience within teachers is effective in combating burnout (Gray et al., 2017).</p>

Self- efficacy	<p>Self-efficacy is people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives.</p> <p>Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behaviour, and social environment (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997 cited by G. Lopez-Garrido, 2020).</p> <p>People with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to cope better in adverse situations (Park and Folkman, 1997).</p>
Skill ability (as concept)	<p>Strength based perspective identify & emphasise a client's talents, skills, abilities and hopes, extended to families and community.</p> <p>Ability to explore options of positive activity/actions to change/improve their situations.</p>
Thanatology	<p>Study of Death as a science. See death education glossary term.</p>
Trauma informed-care	<p>An approach - strengths base framework based on the awareness of the impact of trauma that takes a universal precaution approach, emphasising safety and re-establish control (Huckshor & le Bel 2013)</p>

SUMMARY

This Background Paper explores the key elements that underpin the development of LightsOut.

Grief is a unique experience (Chin, 2016). As death and grief are complex, the absence of death education in Western societies has had negative impacts on mental health. LightsOut (the Program), aims to empower people by increasing their understanding about death, dying and grief. The Program does this by providing personal development tools, educational material, and resources, whilst promoting an open conversation about death in our community.

LightsOut provides an accessible personal development program that builds skills for those facing grief or supporting others. The Program reflects aspects of Lived Experience, Grief Education, and Research associated with death and grief, incorporating evidence-based tools that equip people in practical ways.

Individuals in our western society often face barriers when it comes to building skills and coping with grief. LightsOut is an organisation that responds to this need. Its vision is to make death an accepted and discussed part of life, where grief is embraced and understood.

By becoming more aware of our personal relationship with death and grief, we can better navigate challenging times. These tools help us with self-determination, building our capacity to reframe our reactions and responses to death and grief.

Unfortunately, Death Education (Thanatology), is not widely available formally, however we can build our knowledge thereby increasing our empowerment in other ways. We can learn about strength-based tools that develop our skills, knowledge, and awareness around death and grief. This improves our death literacy and resilience.

Death and Grief as Taboo

Grief is a challenging experience in most societies since everyone has their own concept of death. Death is not always anticipated, and yet we commonly think of the experiences as being associated with old age and peaceful dying. Death is shelved for another time....so over generations, we have come to view grief as an “unwanted affliction, an unwelcome experience, a negative emotion, a deficiency, or something to overcome” (Sadowsky, 2017).

Historically, modern society has grown to fear death. Due to the complexities of death and grief learning in our society, open conversation about death have been hindered and thus become invisible.

Learning about death, however, can help us live our lives with more meaning. When we have contact with death, we are interacting with others and their belief systems. As we all have differing concepts and experiences of death and grief, we must understand how views of death differ to be able to understand the grief that follows.

Impacts of Grief

Many determinants can affect our views on death, including religion, gender, ethnicity, age, and social situations. Since grief is expressed in many different forms and severities, it impacts different population groups in various ways.

Rather than treating grief with only universal strategies, we can expand our grief response to the context of our needs. Therefore, by examining how age, gender, Indigenous culture, suicide, and the Covid19 pandemic affect grief, we can better understand what and how grief skills can help us.

Lived Experience informs us as to how we can better address grief. It helps us identify the strengths that others can teach us about and that others can bring to us. By understanding how grief can impact individuals, we can learn more about how grief as a skill can be adapted, this increases death literacy and helps us to make sense of it.

Grief as a Skill

Because death is not often discussed, grief continues to be a challenging topic, further complicated by myths (Chin 2018). A conscious societal shift is necessary to foster a death-literate society.

Research shows that "Death Education will lead to a much better understanding of the meaning of death and grieving" (cited by Martinčeková (2020) p.19). By studying death and dying, we not only learn to cope with grief but also how to live.

It can be said that we all desire more personal agency when facing grief, and we are better equipped to deal with it when we have the necessary tools and knowledge. This is particularly relevant for children and young people. Through teaching and guiding grief skills, we can strengthen society's capacity for understanding and coping with death.

The LightsOut Program

Achieving full joy and recognizing our life goals can bring more meaning to our lives.

LightsOut recognizes that grief is often a part of personal growth and awareness. It is a natural occurrence and does not always have a negative experience in the long run. With better preparation, grief could bring more meaning and purpose to the experience and our overall lives in general.

Many individuals in Western society experience barriers to building grief skills. We can accept that we will have difficulties when we grieve; it is part of being human. The LightsOut Program explores our awareness of death and promotes personal grief skills by building knowledge of evidence-based tools that support us while we are grieving. Consciously increasing self-awareness around our attitudes and beliefs regarding death and grief can help us better navigate difficult times. Self-determination comes when we are equipped with the tools that help us reframe our reactions to death and grief.

The goal of LightsOut is to strengthen resilience when facing bereavement and grief. The Program emerged intuitively from Lived Experience, offering a comprehensive grief skill personal development program that we believe is unique and unmatched by any other program.

LightsOut opens up transparent conversations that make death and grief fully visible. It promotes death education inclusive of grief skills as a protective factor. Our principles are underpinned by the belief that "death should be an accepted and discussed part of life, and that once we start embracing grief as a skill, then grief will be better understood" (Becker, 2021).

A Grief Sector Participant

As a global platform, LightsOut was created for the betterment of society.

The long-term outcomes of LightsOut aims to improve individual self-reliance, resilience, mental health, and well-being, by providing practical coping strategies for handling grief. Our goal is to bring hope and personal empowerment through all LightsOut interactions. LightsOut aims to provide further support for young people who are actively grieving or want (or need) to access grief skills.

As the platform grows and its audience base increases, there will be further iterations. Feedback will be collected and analysed to ensure that our participants are catered for. Those with Lived Experience will help shape the program over time.

We will continue building death literacy potential by:

- **Speaking** engagements
- **Creating** videos, podcasts, and other multimedia resources to increase access to death literacy
- **Collaborating** with those with Lived Experience and actively seeking resources that build understanding and awareness about suicide bereavement
- **Connecting** with services that offer practical assistance for working through difficult emotions, incorporating therapies such as art, music, and dance, and broadening public access to their online workshops
- **Developing** further tools, including a LIVING WILL (a Will that you can build on over time, reflect and redirect - based on your current thoughts and ideas).

LightsOut aims to provide additional support for young people who are actively grieving or want to access grief skills. We will tap into research opportunities to help develop a modern Death Education syllabus. We will collaborate globally with experts to build capacity and capability for accessible grief skills worldwide.

Section One

INTRODUCTION

This Background Paper (the Paper) offers an understanding of what it means to have an open conversation about grief issues in modern Anglo society and how LightsOut was developed.

LightsOut incorporates aspects of Lived Experience, Grief Education, and Research, associated with death and grief.

LightsOut aims to empower people by increasing understanding about death, dying and grief by providing personal development tools, educational material, and resources, whilst promoting open honest conversations about death in our community.

LightsOut provides a Grief Education Program that is evidence based, focusing on building grief as a skill through personal development.

Death and grief can be a challenging topic. To assist in navigating the Paper, Section One and Two explore the current understanding of death and grief in our western societies. Section Three and Four explain the concept of reframing grief as a skill, what LightsOut as an overarching Program stands for, and how we can embrace grief personally.

DEATH AND GRIEF AS TABOO

Grief is a unique experience (Chin, 2016), and in the absence of death education (known also as Thanatology) in western societies, it can have potential negative impacts on mental health. In this context, we put forward aspects of Lived Experience, grief education, and the research that can enhance an individual's ability to cope with death and grief as well as support others.

Why talk about death?

Despite the various approaches to learning and facing death and grief across the world, death remains largely feared. Additionally, different cultures hold different views on death. For instance, Indigenous peoples base their worldview on ecological associations and spirituality (Sones et al., 2010). Furthermore, Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (First Nation peoples of Australia) have an enriched culture and understanding of death that is community-based (Wynne-Jones et al., 2016, 2022).

Given the knowledge gap about death and grief across the entire world population, it is not surprising that death education and grief are often left to families, religious organizations, and perhaps—precariously—trusted organizations. It is also doubtful that health professionals receive the right information to support, educate, and advise when death is present, including how to best support bereavement.

Grief is challenging in most societies because everyone has their own concept of death. It is not always anticipated because we associate death with old age and peaceful dying. It is also

often viewed as an unwanted affliction, unwelcome experience, negative emotion, deficiency, or something to overcome (Sadowsky, 2017).

Death is celebrated, embraced, and feared (Mutton, 2020), we see that throughout the world, death and the rituals that surround it are steeped in taboos. Grief can thus be a difficult task. We may all someday find ourselves caring for loved ones who are at the end of their life, there's no escaping that. However, when that time inevitably comes, we can all benefit from having a greater, more sensitive and compassionate understanding of how we each view death. And, by increasing that understanding, it helps us to eventually overcome the fear of death; to "free up otherwise wasted energy to be refocused and better used in enjoying one's daily life. To live life more fully now in the present" (Chin 2022). Thus, grief and death can be focused on response not reaction.

Grief, and the actions associated with it, can be taught as a life skill. However, death is rarely embedded in the global curriculum, and we rely on learning about grief through incidental "teachable moments". By seeking out grief as a skillset early in life, we can draw on our strengths and build resilience to face death and bereavement in healthy and informed ways.

A person's self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, wellbeing, and personal accomplishment. High self-efficacy has been linked to numerous benefits in daily life, such as resilience to adversity and stress, healthy lifestyle habits, improved employee performance, and educational achievement (Lopez-Gorido, 2020, p.1). By focusing on strengthening resilience, we can get better results when undertaking and working with our grief, regardless of age.

How do we view death & grief?

Many of us struggle to articulate our fear of dying.

In his 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*, cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker declared that the "fear of death is the basic force unconsciously lurking behind our actions, both as individuals and as civilizations". Social scientists in the decades since have confirmed his insight (Ernest Becker Foundation 2022).

Beliefs Inform Grief

When we encounter death, we are also interacting with others and their belief systems. As everyone has different concepts and experiences of death and grief, it's important to understand how views of death differ and the reactions to grief that follow.

There are many factors that can affect views on death, such as religion, gender, ethnicity, age, social situations, and education disadvantage. For example, women tend to speak more about death than men, and teachers often find themselves in conversations about death without proper training (Engarhos et al., 2013). Religion is also a strong indicator of whether death education is taught in schools; religious schools include more readily death themes and options for the afterlife are discussed as part of the belief system they offer. Teachers are also requested to teach about death in the context of the faith system they belong to. Secular education systems would not be able to adhere to such practices, hence the division

between religion and non-religious school-based death education brings about gaps in the death education process. Without formal curriculum, death and grief are left to teachers to deal with during incidental events (Rodriguez et al., 2020). As death is not intentionally included in education, these determinants can significantly affect death literacy.

By framing death through understanding individual beliefs, we can fully embrace the whole experience and show respect for the different beliefs of others. This way, we can avoid using religion as the only context for learning about death and grief. It is healthier for humanity if we focus on what we have in common, rather than our differences. By considering the finality of life and its meaning, we can also begin to understand what kind of person we want to be.

According to Kelvin Chin (2016), there are four main belief systems that inform our understanding of grief. These systems encompass all Indigenous, cultural, religious, and non-religious views. The four Main Belief Systems About Death, as described by Chin, are:

1. No Belief in Afterlife (when my body dies, my mind shuts off)
2. Afraid of Heaven or Hell (when my body dies, my mind will continue--this may cause fear, but it is mostly fear about what might happen)
3. Looking Forward to Heaven (when my body dies, my mind continues)
4. Belief in Past Lives (when my body dies, when my mind continues and there's some transition viewed as reincarnation or, future lives and past lives)

Some individuals may have a hybrid of any of these belief systems, and no single belief is more important than another. By learning about these different belief systems, we can gain greater clarity and understanding about our own views on death and dying. Furthermore, we can develop a broader awareness and understanding of how and what others think about death, which can help us become better caregivers, regardless of whether we share their beliefs. With this understanding, we can also gain insight into our fears about death.

Death is inevitably followed by grief, which is a normal reaction. Grief is unpredictable, and our reactions may reflect a great deal about who we are, as well as our experiences (or lack thereof) over time. As such, grief can challenge us widely and unexpectedly. Grief, associated with death, is a universal, instinctual, and adaptive reaction to the loss of a loved one. It is comprised of thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physiological changes that vary in pattern and intensity over time (Chin 2016, p.18). It can be subcategorized into acute grief, which is the initial painful response, integrated grief, which is the ongoing, attenuated adaptation to the death of a loved one, and cumulative grief and complicated grief (CG), which is sometimes labelled as prolonged, unresolved, or traumatic grief (Young et al., 2012).

Although the terms grief and bereavement are often used interchangeably, there are some differences between them. "Bereavement is the experience of losing a loved one, and grief is the natural response to this loss" (Goveas & Shear, 2020, p.1120). Several theories of grief have emerged that provide different perspectives for understanding grief and bereavement (these are not counselling models although can be the basis for counselling models):

- Bowlby, 1980, p. 85–96: attachment theory phases include numbing, yearning, and searching, disorganization and despair, and reorganization.
- Worden 1986: stages of grief including actions of grief, supporting the way we respond.
- Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2005: 5 Stages of Grief include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These are interchangeable and not linear.
- Stroebe and Schut, 2010: dual process – coping with bereavement based on relational terms affecting grief responses.
- Rosemary Wanganen, 2010: The Seven Phases to Integrating Loss and Grief, an Aboriginal model of grief that incorporates the complexities of ancient and current grief experiences colliding and integrating as compounding grief structures.
- Chatter's Covid- 19, 2020: "Your world and the ball of grief".

While there are many models and theories for coping with grief, it's important to keep in mind that members of different cultures likely have different norms and practices around grief. A person's own experiential culture will influence their orientation toward grief as well. Different cultural practices, which may seem strange to outsiders, can be considered a strength and benefit to those within non-Western cultures. For example, in China with Taoist-influenced beliefs, relationships between the dead and living continue (Thieleman, 2015, p. 288). In Japan, individuals with a Shintoism or Buddhism background are encouraged to maintain ties with the deceased through religious belief and practices (Stroebe, et al., 2013). Maori culture in New Zealand values caring for the dead body at home, openness to talking about the dead, and including children in death-related rituals (Thieleman, 2015, p. 288). Many Egyptians are encouraged to dwell on their dead, while in Balinese culture, those mourning are encouraged to laugh and be joyful to honour their dead (Stroebe, et al., 2013).

These models underpin the evidence base for most academics and counsellors; however, they can be elusive to the bystander. If we can have open conversations about death and grief, these subjects could be less of a taboo, and we can all benefit from fearing death less and understanding grief better.

Why do we fear death?

Our society tends to deny death (Kastenbaum, 1981, cited by Testoni, 2021). We struggle to talk about death because we are afraid of it. Our fear of death is influenced by various factors. For some, it's because we don't know what happens after death.

Fear of death is not a new concept. It can stem from anxiety about feeling helpless or from terror about death itself (Becker, 1973). Children can also be burdened by their parents' fear of death, known as generational death phobia. In some countries in the world, such as the United States, children are shielded from death on a regular basis under the assumption that children lack the cognitive and emotional capacities to cope with death (Rosengren, Miller, Gutiérrez, Chow, Schein, & Anderson, 2014; cited by Martinčková).

History Informs Grief

The fear of death is not a new phenomenon in our society. Anglophone and French literature suggest that it stems from a historical sociological context of death denial that has become ingrained in our modern psyche (Robert & Tradii, 2017).

Anglophone countries have not always exhibited death-phobic tendencies. In the past, when people died at home, the whole family would be present to witness it, allowing children to understand death. During the Middle Ages, plagues and cholera epidemics claimed the lives of tens of millions of people, making death a common experience. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the sick were often cared for at home since little could be done for them outside of easing symptoms. Most people died at home, often days after receiving care from family members.

Death surrounded the communities of the Victorian era, both at home and in the streets. Aristocratic funeral processions were major events, often involving all the elements of a baronial funeral. Extravagant funerals had become the norm before the reign of Queen Victoria, and the ultimate disgrace was to be assigned a pauper's grave. Around this time, funerals were less extravagant in Australia, and mourning rituals were less strict, especially in rural areas.

However, during the Victorian Era, before medical death certificates existed, viewing, and touching the corpse was commonplace to confirm identity and death. Children were not spared from these experiences either and, in poor households, would share a room or even a bed with a dying sibling, or other close family member.

From the 1870s, reforms in Britain, Australia, and other colonized nations, such as Northern America, led to a move toward modest and cheaper funerals. The First World War marked the end of elaborate Victorian-style funerals and Christian mourning rituals in the British Commonwealth. The large number of soldiers who died and were buried overseas, along with the resulting collective grief, made grand funerals and individual displays of mourning at home seem inappropriate and self-indulgent. During this time, mementos such as locketts, brooches, and rings, often containing a lock of hair and photograph, served as tangible reminders of the deceased. They were especially effective memorials in Australia, where loved ones may have died and been buried far away. Locks of hair were also sentimental gifts from the living, becoming powerful keepsakes after their passing (Mutton, 2022).

During the 1900s, the focus of medicine shifted from providing only comfort to curing underlying diseases. In the past, becoming sick meant certain death, but with medical advancements, people began to be cured. As a result, fewer people died at home and were instead cared for by professional health care workers in hospitals. Nurses transitioned from working in homes to working in hospitals. With the increase in hospitals came a higher number of deaths occurring within them and fewer at home.

Thanks to a multitude of medical advances, medicine has intervened in the natural history of diseases, saving, and lengthening the lives of many. However, the focus on prolonging life has also led to the unintended perception of death as a failure in the medical profession.

Today, people in the developed world are living well beyond their seventies, and death is often seen as something that only happens in old age. While we do hear stories of car accidents, murders, suicides, and more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic (WHO Pandemic 2019-2022), our exposure to death is mostly impersonal.

While it is understandable that grief has come to be understood in a culture with a dominant biomedical model of human health, this understanding is not universal among all cultures, past or present. It may be a sign that our Anglo-culture is grief-illiterate.

Freud spoke about the fear of death in terms of leaving a parent behind. He stated, "One is frightened by the emptiness, the gap that would be left by one's disappearance." More deeply, he thought behaviors were "more about how one can cope with someone else's grief over one's disappearance. Instead of experiencing the stark terror of losing oneself as a disappearing object, one clings to the image of someone else" (Freud, quoted by Becker 1973, p.50).

As a society, we are still reluctant to openly discuss the ultimate reality of life. We cannot comprehend what lies beyond death. King-McKenzie (2011) suggests that for some, acknowledging death or even mentioning the word might bring about their own demise (p.6). This perpetuates the barriers to moving forward with such topics, especially for professionals and school-aged individuals.

*"The reality is, sooner or later everyone faces death, we cannot hide from it.
If we talk about death to our children,
they will come to know that we are on this terrestrial ball
for only a time and no doubt lead better lives."*

King-McKenzie 2011 p.5

The realities of death and grief are often avoided or seen as losses or tragedies that need to be overcome as quickly as possible. The biomedical model, which emphasizes curing, views death as a failure of life (Byock, 2002). Consequently, many Western individuals find themselves living in a death-phobic society and may even be death-phobic themselves. As a result, grief is often shelved or avoided, hidden from view. Nevertheless, death is an inevitability for all humans. While there's a natural inclination to avoid this reality, research, cultural practices, and wisdom suggest that being willing to approach grief and loss may be more useful than avoiding it.

Previous societies derived much of their cultural identity from the way they grieved, and some modern societies still do. Current thinking about grief therapy is shifting towards assisting clients in making meaning, and experiential research suggests that engaging with death in various ways may deepen people's appreciation of life and death (Cacciatore, 2013; Horrigan, 2003; Stroebe, et al., 1992; Thieleman, 2015; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Kablenz, 2015; Mendes, Goncalves, & Neimeyer, 2012; cited by Sadowsky, 2017).

Furthermore, truly overcoming our fears is ultimately the primary way to ensure our own happiness in life (Engarhos et al., 2013). It helps with life objectives as we review belief systems and think about our views on death.

Thus, individuals experience many barriers to developing skills to cope with grief in our society. Since mourning and bereavement are intrinsically linked to grief, if we view grief as a skill, then the resulting mourning and bereavement will be more attainable and healthier. This allows us to find our own truth within the process and provides us with agency for handling grief. We can then rely less on family of origin framing, myths we grew up with, or societal expectations of what is tasteful or palatable.

Therefore, it is essential to consider how comprehending death can help us decrease and ultimately conquer the fear of it. The benefits of being open to this type of thinking are that it can “help us live more enjoyable and productive lives... being clearer about our fears helps us to be much more effective in solving those fears” (Becker 2021).

SECTION TWO

THE IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Grief is a uniquely individual experience, so we must unravel its impact on others to understand the plethora of differences that exist. By doing so, we can add value to death education as it evolves.

Health and social care intersect with an individual's Lived Experience of grief. It is essential to understand what may have helped or supported individuals better during their grief, even if only in retrospect, given the consequences of such intrinsically linked life experiences.

Age

Children and Youth

As with people of all ages, a young person's concept of death can be influenced by their experiences and emotional development. In Australia, 1 in 20 children lose a parent when they are young. In the USA, an estimated 1 in 14 or 5.3 million children will experience the death of a parent or sibling before they reach the age of 18, according to the US Census in 2020. Similarly, Canada estimates that 1 in 14 children will experience the death of a parent or sibling by the time they turn 18, as reported by Grief Network in 2016. In 2015, the UK reported that parents left behind around 41,000 dependent children aged 0-17 (40,000 in 2014), which equates to 112 newly bereaved children every day.

These statistics are staggering and are replicated throughout the developed world (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Moreover, the top five causes of death contribute significantly to the number of young people who experience the death of a loved one in their most formative years. This Lived Experience of grief adds further burden for young people, as they are likely to know at least one other person who has died by suicide or from a traumatic/sudden death of family, friends, or acquaintances.

Death is one of the most emotional and complex matters that a child can experience (Slaughter & Griffiths, 2007). Today, young children are exposed to death through various forms of media in their communities, schools (including set reading texts), and homes (Aspinall, 1996, cited by Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2021). Given this inevitability of exposure, there is a need for evidence-based death education to better inform today's youth about the subject.

While discussions about death often occur at home, there may be times when bereaved families are too consumed by their own grief to provide children with the emotional support they need (Papadatou, Metallinou, Hatzichristou, & Pavlidi, 2002, cited by Engarhos et al., 2017). It has been shown that the type of support children receive during a period of mourning significantly affects their bereavement experience. Therefore, it is important to provide developmentally appropriate bereavement support and death education to children (Papadatou et al., 2002, cited by Engarhos et al., 2017).

School-aged children have a more realistic understanding of death. They view death as permanent and know that everyone dies. The uncertainty of what happens after they die

may cause them to fear their own death. Fear of the unknown, loss of control, and separation from family and friends are the main sources of anxiety and fear related to death for school-aged children. As death is recognized as more permanent, it can threaten some of the key areas of self-esteem, confidence, independence, and feelings of security.

Young people may experience bereavement with tragic and unanticipated circumstances, making it more difficult to tackle the complexities of grieving. This can lead to unhelpful behaviors and further risk of depression and suicide (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2021).

The grieving process of adolescents is like that of adults. According to Santos et al. (cited by Kumar, 2021), adolescents understand death as “irreversible, universal, and non-functional”, yet the resources available are not adequate to support them. Weinstock et al. (2021) suggests that “adolescents may be vulnerable to developing complicated grief due to a lack of adequate support systems and ...could disrupt the identity formation of adolescents.”. As example, the Covid-19 pandemic which commenced in 2019, distanced whole communities and individuals from the death experience due to lockdowns and infectious disease protocols across the world. This meant that grief went unchecked over a long period of time because the death and thus grief norms and practices were often unable to be celebrated or adhered to. Over time, it is expected that adolescents may experience problems, illness, crisis, and loss at the workplace, difficulties in educational achievements and aspirations, and an increased risk of psychological disorders, including complex or prolonged grief.

Adults

Complicated or prolonged grief is not limited to children. After a loss, such as the death of a spouse or child, up to a third of adults who are most directly affected will experience detrimental effects on their physical or mental health, or both. Such bereavements increase the risk of death from heart disease and suicide, as well as causing or contributing to a variety of psychosomatic and psychiatric disorders.

Around a quarter of widows and widowers experience clinical depression and anxiety during the first year of bereavement. The risk drops to about 17% by the end of the first year and continues to decline thereafter. These trends have grown exponentially as our world has become more urbanized and isolated (Parkes, 1998).

The Covid-19 pandemic has added to the list of grief and loss that can impact adults during their lives. Despite evidence that losses can foster maturity and personal growth, we cannot ignore the warnings about the emerging "mental health" pandemic as we move forward. Grief responses are unpredictable.

Notable death events, such as the death of a child, traumatic deaths (accidents or suicide), death caused by war or genocide, all impact an individual's mental health and their capacity to support their families (children and older parents), reach potential work or academic milestones. This creates a double impact of trauma-related experiences and can affect our society, where social functioning and community connectedness risks being dismantled at any time.

There are also concerns about the vulnerability of racial and ethnic minorities in various parts of the world (Moore et al., 2020, as cited by Kumar, 2021).

Elderly

Grieving is a life event that is often experienced as profound grief by the elderly. According to Clegg (1988), gender (especially female sex), lower education, depressive symptoms, and loss of a partner or a child were associated with severe grief responses amongst the elderly. In one study, 31% of 71 patients admitted to a psychiatric unit for the elderly had recently been bereaved (Clegg 1988, cited by Parkes 1998). Amongst those grieving, close to 25% had persistent grief after 6 years. To confirm and explore these findings and to identify potential predictors of grief severity and duration, more longitudinal studies are needed (Clegg 1988, cited by Parkes 1998, Milic 2017).

Grief affects people of all ages, including the elderly. Unfortunately, they are often overlooked as we assume they have the grief skills already because of their age. However, older individuals are not immune to the negative impacts of death, such as complicated grief, depression, and suicidal thoughts. According to a study by Fujisawa et al. (2010), individuals who have lost their spouse are at a higher risk of developing complicated grief later in life, compared to those who have lost someone else. Bereaved spouses with prolonged grief also struggle with accessing positive memories of the deceased as well as difficulty adjusting to being on their own, often leading to severe consequences on their physical and mental health (Mancini, Sinan, & Bonanno 2015; Milic et al. 2017).

It's important to note that suicide ideation and death by suicide are still a concern among the elderly, but they may not always be reported.

Gender

Gender can have a significant impact on grief. According to Maccallum et al. (2021, p.2), "gender has been proposed as a potentially important predictor of bereavement outcomes". Gender can have both positive and negative influences on grief emotions and can shed light on perceptions and understandings of grief.

It is unfortunate that the importance of gender in grief is often overlooked. Inequality persists in our society, which translates into gender disparities in grief resources, counselling approaches, and acceptance of different expressions of grief. As a result, invisible grief systems are created. Individuals and even entire communities may be hesitant to discuss their grief needs, rituals/traditions, or grievances from unresolved past grief (Braveheart 1998, Gone et al. 2019, Ortega-Williams et al. 2021).

Examining popular children's books on grief highlights the issue of gender disparity and prompts considerations about what children are exposed to. Research shows that gendered grief is perpetuated in children's picture books on grief, which poses a problem for how children process emotions (Budgeon, 2015). Budgeon suggests that fighting against sexism and gender differences, particularly gendered grief, will be an uphill battle. The underrepresentation of both women and men and the reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes in these books have an impact on how children grieve and process emotions, as

seen in American culture. Genderless books on grief, such as "The Purple Balloon" by Raschka (2012), cited by Budgeon (2015), can attribute complex emotions to humans rather than specific genders, creating a standard where both young girls and boys can learn to express emotion healthily and freely as they age. It is proposed that books free of sexism, including underrepresentation, stereotypes, and gender roles, will become the norm, as Budgeon (2015) suggests.

Gender dynamics and gendered expectations regarding expression of emotion have an impact on how women and men express and discuss their grief in the modern era. The recent trend to pathologize grief disproportionately affects women as they are over diagnosed with bereavement related- disorders such as complicated grief and clinical depression, when compared to men. This over-diagnosis not only is a result of many individual and social factors that are situated in gender inequalities but also is influenced by the contemporary psychological need to "control", "predict", and "manage" grief. This overdiagnosis results from social factors rooted in gender inequalities (Granek, 2021).

There are still grief situations that are not identified as well for males. The need to manage and control grief in institutions to dampen down its impact on others has created a predictable and yet unhealthy grief journey, particularly for men. For example, in health institutions the support given to males during the death of an infant/child, especially in cases of miscarriage or stillbirth, can have negative effects on them. Therefore, health professionals need to have a gender lens when dealing with death situations, so all those present can respond in meaningful and healthier ways (Granek, 2021). It is important then, to highlight the need to focus on men's grieving experiences, as they are often invisible during certain death events and are expected to be stoic for the sake of the woman. It is not clear whether this same impact occurs in same-gendered couples, an area of grief that is also invisible. Relationship breakdown is often overrepresented in this context as well (Welte, 2013).

On the other hand, some males may grieve so differently that they are misunderstood to be denying grief awareness when they are processing grief in different ways. Whilst men are known to tough it out in the initial phases of grief, often not recognising they need help, they also seek other ways to grieve unlike women. There are strong indications that men grieve through 'honour actions' and because of this, we observe honour rituals, which may be viewed as dysfunctional grief behaviour as they seem outside the norms (Welte,2013).

When considering culture, gender is a determinant factor. For certain ethnicities, including Indigenous peoples, only individuals of the same gender will be spoken to when attending to tasks related to grief. This fact has an impact on interactions with workers, particularly when seeking help. Care should be taken to consult with communities, and adequate staffing should be considered when providing resources (Rivart et al., 2021).

Research is indicating that after a period, albeit - 2 years (Milic 2017), all genders have reached the same point of reference for how grief has impacted them. This fact may prompt more thinking about gendered grief and how those differences need to be monitored, accepted, and acknowledged (more research is required to expand on this current view).

Indigenous Nations

For First Nations peoples in Australia, Canada, and Northern America, the loss of culture and languages, as well as the loss of identity, including pride and a sense of kinship with other First Nations peoples, are all connected and interrelated with the traumatic deaths of their ancestors (Bombay et al., 2009).

Grief is more complex for Indigenous peoples, as "death is a potential threat to social harmony." With the added complexity of intergenerational trauma created by colonization, bereavement and grief is intertwined with the trauma experienced over generations (Atkinson, 2022, p. 34, 76). Intergenerational trauma has specific impacts on grief for Indigenous nations worldwide, more so than other cultures. Grief opens previous grief experiences and acting as a traumatic 'repeat', the subsequent traumatic grief responses are intrinsically linked to the inherited unresolved ones.

The term historical trauma, also known as cumulative trauma, soul wound, and inter-generational trauma, originates from research on the experiences of Holocaust survivors and their families (Brave Heart cited by Bombay et al., 2009). It refers to the cumulative emotional and psychological harm experienced throughout an individual's lifespan and through subsequent generations.

It is important to distinguish between intergenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a psychological disorder also caused by exposure to trauma. According to Brave Heart (cited by Bombay), although PTSD is adequate to describe the depth and effects of cumulative trauma, it is too narrow in scope and fails to adequately address complex Aboriginal experiences. Unfortunately, colonization and racism have become determinants of grief, as death bereavement is intrinsically linked to trauma for Indigenous Nations worldwide (Sherwood, 2015; Gone et al., 2019; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021).

Even if protected from the traumatic life experiences of family, some Indigenous children, like non-Indigenous children, may directly experience trauma through exposure to a death event in this context and can be further traumatized (Atkinson, 2013). Historical and ongoing racism, as well as a lack of cultural safety and competence among non-Aboriginal staff, have excluded Aboriginal people from mainstream grief service provision (Wynne-Jones et al., 2016). The literature documents limited grief-specific resources addressing the needs of Aboriginal children. Prioritizing understanding about grief practices, especially in the workplace, can help cater to the respect for indigenous collective grief. Additionally, practices such as self-cutting and the prohibition of using the name, image, voice, and possessions of the deceased person as a sign of respect should be acknowledged and integrated where they are practiced (Wynne-Jones et al., 2016).

Culture

In western culture, there is a lack of grief skilfulness. This creates structural barriers that stigmatize many ethnic groups and prevent them from feeling they can be open in their expressions of grief.

It is well documented in the literature that individuals bereaved by suicide are a high-risk, vulnerable group, especially in terms of suicide ideation (Shefer et al., 2013; Memon, 2016; Hunt, 2003 cited by Rivart et al., 2021).

The experience of grief, particularly suicide bereavement, among ethnic minority groups is not well understood. Although there appear to be no significant differences between ethnic groups in terms of grieving processes, these groups often experience poorer health outcomes. Moreover, certain ethnic groups face additional barriers to seeking help, often due to structural or systemic factors. Cultural identity can also hinder the identification of psychological distress and seeking help for it. It is important to note that ethnic minority groups are diverse and differ from one another in terms of help-seeking behaviors, and this could be considered in postvention interventions.

Despite attempts to engage with services, ethnic minority groups reported a lack of support and the prevalence of stigma. These preliminary results suggest that ethnic minority people need visible and accessible services they can successfully engage with and that can support them in their grief (Rivart et al., 2021).

Suicide

Suicide presents numerous complexities and consequences, including grief.

Every suicide is a tragedy. According to the most recent World Health Organization (WHO) 2019 report, global reports of suicide are 1.3% of the population, but there is a ten-fold difference in this share across the world. The highest rates are seen in South Korea, with 4.5% of deaths from suicide in 2019, 3.0% in Qatar, and 3.3% in Sri Lanka. In Greece, this share is ten times lower, at 0.4%, and in Indonesia, it's 0.5%. When translated to the raw data, over 800,000 people die due to suicide every year. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-19-year-olds. 77% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO 2019 Report, 2022).

In the United Kingdom, around 6,000 people die by suicide every year, and it is estimated that between six and 60 individuals are affected by each suicide. However, recent evidence suggests that up to 135 people could be affected, with the possibility that the number of people bereaved by suicide every year in the UK has been underestimated (Rivart et al., 2021). This places suicide grief as a high-risk population group, with impacts that could remain unresolved for years. People bereaved by suicide experience physical and mental health issues, including a higher risk of attempting suicide and dying by suicide, developing depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and engaging in high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse. Compared to people bereaved by other sudden modes of death, this group also reports higher levels of stigma, shame, and guilt.

These studies from the UK are comparable to those from other developed societies. As a result, suicide bereavement is considered a highly stigmatizing form of bereavement, which can limit the help-seeking behaviour of those who are bereaved. This issue has a ripple effect on suicide ideation and the likelihood of developing complex grief, which requires our urgent attention.

For those affected by suicide, especially young people, access to grief skills is even more imperative. If one suicide can affect more than 130 people in grief response, grief as a skill could contribute to alleviating the suffering and serve as a protective factor. Adolescents are resilient, and with proper information, guidance, and support they can learn to cope with the suicide of a fellow peer, process their grief, and return to healthy functioning (Suicide Toolkit USA, 2022). This resilience shown by young people suggests that grief skills could build confidence for them to assist other young people after a suicide event, as well as achieve self-care. This further reinforces protective factors we already know about, such as being engaged and finding purposeful activities while grieving. Skill training programs have also been included as effective suicide prevention (Wasserman, 2021).

Latham and Prigerson (2004) found that complex grief is associated with higher levels of suicidal ideation, independent of PTSD and depression (as cited by Young et al., 2012). Additionally, one study suggested that grief after a suicide loss begins to integrate between 3 to 5 years, raising questions about what is considered a "normal" timeline for grief after suicide. It is noteworthy that in at least one sample studied, symptoms of traumatic grief six months after a peer suicide predicted the onset of depression or PTSD at subsequent time points. Therefore, clinicians must be able to identify traumatic grief to provide appropriate support and treatment when needed (Feigelman et al., 2009, as cited by Young et al., 2012).

In summary, suicide survivors face unique challenges that can impede the normal grieving process, putting them at increased risk for developing complicated grief, concurrent depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation. While the field of suicide bereavement research is growing, there remains a need for more knowledge on the psychological sequelae of suicide bereavement and its treatment, particularly among young males, the elderly, those with pre-existing mental illnesses, gender, and minorities (Becker 2021, King-McKenzie 2011). We also need a better understanding of how prevention skills can support those with bereavement in a more targeted way.

Covid19 Pandemic - SARS-CoV-2 virus (2019)

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation in 2020 (WHO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life worldwide, despite the approval and distribution of vaccines. Infection rates remain high in many parts of the world, and while some countries are preparing for post-pandemic life, others are still struggling to keep death tolls low (2022).

The pandemic has led to the deaths of millions of people and has impacted everyone in some way. Many have experienced losses and grief responses that have affected their physical and psychological health. Verdery (2020) predicted that in the United States, for every COVID-19 death, nine people are expected to grieve. The estimated number is likely to be even higher in non-Western, collectivistic societies with close kinship ties and larger families (Verdery, 2020, cited by Kumar, 2021, p.3).

As a result, many individuals will find themselves mourning the death of their loved ones. Petry et al. (2021) have suggested that COVID-19 related deaths will result in an "epidemic within the epidemic." What makes dying and grieving unique during the pandemic is the

voluntary and involuntary isolation from others, the inability to say goodbye, or to organize a proper funeral for the deceased. COVID-19 deaths are considered "bad deaths" due to the circumstances surrounding the death, making the bereaved individuals prone to chronic and pathological grief (Carr et al., 2020, quoting Kumar, 2021, p. 11).

Moreover, for many bereaved individuals, their losses may not be duly recognized, as the dead are reduced to mere statistics and numbers displayed on screens. These conditions prevent mourning and could complicate the grieving process. Such disruptions in the grieving process could lead to prolonged grief disorder (PGD), a newly added psychological disorder by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Several studies have confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic, with its many deaths in different spheres of life, has adversely affected the mental health of individuals (Kumar & Nayar, 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020). Shigemura et al. (2020) have emphasized the effects of COVID-19 on fear, anxiety, loneliness, emotional outbursts, and sleep disturbances. Issues with anxiety, sleep, stress, and suicide due to COVID-19 are also discussed by Sher (2020).

The fear of infection and the anticipation of its severity and death may cause mental traumas. The COVID-19 pandemic can lead to panic attacks, depression, paranoia, and suicide (Ornell et al., 2020). The pandemic's negative impact on mental health is widespread, making it necessary to explore its influence, particularly on bereaved individuals, and suggest psycho-social interventions. The pandemic is likely to severely affect the mental health of bereaved individuals (Vedery, 2020; Petry, 2021; Kumar & Nayar, 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020; Shigemura et al., 2020; Sher, 2020; Ornell et al., 2020; cited by Kumar, 2021, p. 2).

Hence the death in this context is expected to compound the bereavement process. Eisma (2021, p.9) acknowledged the expectedness of death as "an essential distinguishing factor for grief resulting from COVID death and death due to natural causes," but Tang and Xiang (2021, p.9) argued that "the subjective traumatic level of stress" is more significant than the unexpectedness of death for the severity of grief responses. Mental health professionals are concerned that non recognition of the dead, their reduction to mere statistics, and the ambiguity surrounding the death are likely to result in disenfranchised and delayed grief responses. Moreover, the grieving process may vary for individuals in different life stages, from preschool children to the elderly.

The grieving process can result in somatic responses, anger, and behavioural issues among children. Additionally, marginalized communities based on race, class, region, and religion are likely to bear a greater burden of grief resulting from this pandemic. The literature suggests that the losses during the Covid 2019 pandemic will lead to an epidemic of grief.

SECTION THREE

GRIEF AS A SKILL

We can observe that events such as divorce, death, and financial crisis are undoubtedly substantial stressors that can alter our mental stability affecting our ability to flourish (Keyes 2002). Thus, if we are languishing in our mental health, we could be more susceptible to complex grief.

Further, grief is not always complex; most often, it can be a transitory and memorable part of life. The more severe, inherent, or traumatic the death event, the more complex the grief. Often, this grief is intractable and requires intensive support and counselling. As we all want personal 'agency' when it comes to handling grief, the more skills we gain, the more equipped we will be.

Death is often a difficult conversation, further complicated by myths (Chin, 2018), as it is an inevitable event with often disastrous impacts - making grief even more challenging. To achieve a death-literate society, systemic change needs to take place at a conscious level. Research has shown that "Death Education will lead to a much better understanding of the meaning of death and grieving" (Lee, Lee Moon, 2009, cited by Stylianou et al., 2019, p.1). We can teach and guide grief, but also "study death and dying so we know how to live" (DePaul Thanatology Syllabus, University, 2020).

Death Literacy Matters

Because society has become increasingly distanced from death in everyday life, it has created an impact on our understanding of grief as a life skillset (Longbottom et al. 2018). Moreover, instead of a death-denying culture, life and death education has been mentioned frequently by encouraging people to think about, talk about and acknowledge death (Huang et al., 2021).

Death education varies in specific goals, formats, duration, intensity, and characteristics of participants. It can be formal or informal. Formal death education relies on structured academic programs of study and clinical experience. These courses cover topics such as attitudes toward death, processes of dying and bereavement, and care for people affected by death. Death education assumes that death-denying, death-defying, and death-avoiding attitudes, and practices in Western culture can be transformed, and that individuals and institutions will be better equipped to deal with death-related practices.

Death education has been present in many countries since the 1960s and 70s (Wass, 2004), but became more academic from 1975 onwards (Durlak, 1991). According to the Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying (2010), death education addresses the problems of modern life and helps individuals develop skills to solve them. These skills include understanding and appreciating oneself, others, and life, managing anger and frustration, and developing attitudes of tolerance, respect, empathy, and compassion, all of which contribute to a high quality of life.

The curricula established by our education systems set out objectives, contents, and assessment criteria for schools at all levels. However, there are topics that are a part of life

and can affect schools which are not represented in the official curricula. One of these topics is death, which, although closely linked to history, art, biology, philosophy, health education, war, genocide, the life cycle, and the loss of biodiversity, is not encompassed in curriculum planning or granted any kind of educational value (Herran et al., 2000, 2019; James, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018). Thus, the importance of the awareness of death is ignored in education, although international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommend that schools should educate children for life (UNESCO, 2014, 2015).

In the fields of health and social work, research into death education goes back to the 1920s (Rodriguez et al., 2019). At this time, the scientific and professional communities began to realize the need for specific training in death, designed for health professionals. The transference of death education to the educational sphere goes back to the 1980s, with the appearance of studies and proposals on normalising death in schools (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Initially, death education was linked to preparation for loss and attention to students in situations of bereavement (i.e., Aspinall, 1996; Berg, 1978). Later, other approaches to death education emerged in various fields, such as the philosophy of education (Melich, 1989), pedagogy and didactics, curriculum studies, awareness-based education (Herran et al., 2000), and education for life (Corr et al., 2019; Petitfils, 2016).

The latest developments in the field see death education as the area studied by the pedagogy of death. This is an area relating to teaching, learning, and research within a form of education for life that takes the awareness of death into account (Herran et al., 2000; Herran & Cortina, 2006). It includes two approaches: first, the curricular, which seeks to normalise death through what is taught and learnt; and second, the palliative, oriented toward counselling action by tutors in situations of bereavement.

Research into death education has advanced notably in recent years, with studies on the following topics: (a) the purposes of education (Melich, 1989); (b) different approaches to and aspects of how death may be taught, relating it to emotional education, the life cycle (Aspinall, 1996), education for life (Corr et al., 2019; Petitfils, 2016), socio-critical competence (Mantegazza, 2004), the curriculum, teaching methods, education for awareness (Herran & Cortina, 2006; Herran et al., 2000), and topics such as genocide and the Holocaust (Bos, 2014; Burtonwood, 2002; Lindquist, 2007; Zembylas, 2011); (c) teaching resources for death education (Herran & Cortina, 2006; Herran et al., 2000) such as the cinema (Cortina & Herran, 2011), children's literature (Colomo, 2016) and service learning (Rodriguez et al., 2015); (d) "partial" or "little deaths" (Dennis, 2009; Herran et al., 2000); (e) counselling for bereavement in schools through tutorial action (Dyregrov et al., 2013; Herran & Cortina, 2006; Herran et al., 2000; Holland, 2008; Willis, 2002); and (f) the presence of death in the curriculum at the different levels of education (Herran et al., 2000, 2019; James, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018).

Community's perceptions of death and its potential inclusion in education have been investigated via the attitudes of students, families, and teachers. Research undertaken among students has centred on educational needs in the area of death as perceived by sixth-form students (Birkholz et al., 2004); pupils' construct of death in early childhood (Vlok & de Witt, 2012), primary and secondary schools (Yang & Chen, 2006); and death education

in university education (Harrawood et al., 2011). Some studies have also been carried out on perceptions of death education among families (Herran et al., 2000; Jones et al., 1995; McGovern & Barry, 2000). The first (Jones et al., 1995), a study undertaken with a sample of 375 mothers and fathers, found that 77% of parents believed that death education in schools would not interfere with their parental responsibilities. In a study by Herran et al. (2000), 93% of 87 parents of schoolchildren aged 3–6years thought that the school should be prepared with some sort of educational response to cases where children were affected by the death of a loved one.

However, there are still barriers for death literacy to be prioritised in most Anglo-education institutions. Unfortunately, there still seems to be limited opportunities for laypeople to improve their death literacy outside of hospice and palliative care contexts. Additionally, education sectors for children and young people have moved away from teaching about death and grief, despite it once being acceptable. Educators and counsellors have become fearful of unintended harm that may result (Longbottom et al., 2018, p.2).

Death has gradually been removed from home life. Coincidentally, research also reports that significant changes to attitudes about how children should be raised over time have affected death awareness. As a natural response of parenting, there is evidence to suggest that some parents wish to protect their children from the negative effects of grief and thus hinder their child's learning about death and grief unwittingly (Longbottom et al., 2018).

In western societies, medicalised and institutionalised death and dying experiences have become commonplace (Lamers, 1995, cited by Longbottom et al., 2018). As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for researchers to evaluate and introduce research about death and grief for all ages. Teachers have also lacked confidence and support to teach about death. The Lived Experience of younger people expressing their desire to talk about life and death has been ignored as a curriculum initiative (Hames cited by Testoni et al., 2020). With this openness about interacting with the death process from those with Lived Experience, death education should be age-appropriate and supportive (Higgins, 1999).

According to clinical psychologists and bereavement experts, it is important to prepare people for death, especially children (Longbottom, 2018, p.2). Rather than relying on incidental and extreme events to teach us, we should aim towards a more robust awareness of grief skills. To reform practice, professionals could highlight grief skills in proactive ways, instead of constantly being drawn in to only putting out "spot fires."

Research indicates that death and grief are not commonly discussed these days. With the advent of modern medicine, colloquial rituals have shifted, and the impacts of death are more acute due to urbanisation and global dynamics, including Indigenous peoples. Families are more isolated from the close communities of the past, and we find ourselves shielded from grief experiences. As a result, "children and even young adults have become increasingly isolated from the realities of death in everyday life" (Miller et al., 2014 cited by Longbottom et al., 2018). This has historically fed the environment of stoicism in modern cultures and perpetuated death phobia and denial.

No one should be excluded from knowledge about death. Therefore, in addition to prioritizing grief therapy, we should focus on developing mainstream death literacy in curriculum and community contexts to shape positive social impact.

To promote cultural safety and personal wellbeing, it is important to prioritize death literacy and increase our skilfulness in this area. Death education should be frank and honest, without being unnecessarily confronting. Since understanding life and death is interconnected, teaching them together makes sense (Longbottom et al., 2018). As King-McKenzie (2011) states, "If we learn about death, we are likely to be more prepared to live our lives to the full" (p.5). This is reason enough to continue working towards acquiring knowledge, understanding of grief, and developing grief skills.

Grief Skills Development

If death and grief are an inevitable part of life, grief taught as an enduring skill can bring a certain quality of living as we find meaning and purpose.

With the increasing frequency of critical death events such as terrorism, heinous criminal massacres, public place/school shootings, and suicide, myths about grief persist. Grief skills have become invisible over time, only accessed through counselling methods after the trauma has already occurred. By teaching grief skills as mainstream, we can be proactive. By providing a mix of formal and informal education, as well as therapeutic models of grief counselling, we can engage fully with grief education as a continuum. This approach will transform the accessibility to understanding death and bring more meaning to life and grief as it occurs.

As change is not rapid in this field, it may take another generation to connect curriculum-thinking to the knowledge translation that brings pathways for mainstream grief education. It will need a societal shift to ensure 'grief transfer' is not the only way of learning how to face death and grief.

Learning grief skills can potentially strengthen resilience during the times we need it the most. According to well-known scholars, death and grief are "more about life and living" (Kubler-Ross et al., 2014, p. 15). Grief learning connects us to deeper connections to death literacy. "Learning grief" is our chance to become more aware of how we live our lives and what our life's meaning is. We can build awareness that underpins strength around death and grief. "We need death in our lives (it is inevitable) to define our living" (Aswell, 1991, cited by King-McKenzie, 2011, p.6).

Thus, death literacy and grief skills are about living our lives with more meaning. Death and a meaningful life are intrinsically linked.

"We need not fear death, we need death in our lives".

King -McKenzie 2011

Death is an integral part of the human experience, and its impact can create a variety of circumstances for individuals and communities. Although societies desire to engage with the

process, we may have lost the ability to do so effectively. Considering the effects of grief and the need for a better understanding of how it affects us, the concept of grief as a skill is proposed. Despite available resources and commentary on grief, this skill is not intended to replace counselling or collaborative community rituals. Rather, it enhances our ability to live our lives in a way that equips us to respond to grief with greater awareness and personal agency. Grief skilfulness can also transform our interactions with grief when we are currently experiencing it. Finally, grief skills are a vital life skill, as we will inevitably encounter the grief of others.

Death literacy, which includes tools for handling grief, can bring self-confidence when helping others. Acts of kindness are a central focus of these life skills, promoting independence and the ability for an individual to reflect on purposeful actions of grief.

The body of evidence emerging, confirms that grief can be taught. Death awareness, in tandem with mental strength skills, can have a positive impact on facing grief. Grief as a skill requires a proactive focus on accessible tools that can assist our mental strength when facing grief. Some skills, which are well-known but may need practice or deeper understanding, are difficult to take up seamlessly amidst crises. We may need time to build our toolkit of skills around death and grief so that we can respond skilfully.

In his interviews with a limited number of Social Workers, Michael Sadowsky (2017) explores the potential that grief can increase skilfulness as human beings. He outlines further that there is the potential for "many changes, including deepened understanding of self, deepened understanding of and empathy for others, and deeper understanding of life itself, including a deepened appreciation and gratitude for life, finding meaning in loss, increased meaning and purpose in life, an ability to tolerate suffering and change, and other potential changes" (Sadowsky 2017, p.2).

Sadowsky also draws on the author Stephen Jenkinson, who believes that we can cultivate grief through grief experiences (Jenkinson 2019). Jenkinson's research and experience in the bereavement space have informed him to conclude that being skilful in grief is a double-edged sword. He shares that the experiences of grief lead to better understanding and that skilfulness is often a learning during this time. Jenkinson describes grief as "a kind of radical moral intelligence about what it means to be alive...a tenderizer of the soul" (Davis, interview with S. Jenkinson, 2019).

According to Jenkinson, grief is a skill that can be developed through exercises of grief and a willingness to face difficult things (Davis, 2019). He suggests that learning to grieve is like learning to love, in that it requires both experiencing love and practicing it. While this approach may lead to positive outcomes, it is not a guarantee, as grief is a unique experience for everyone.

Jenkinson also argues that "grief is not a feeling. Grief is a skill" that can be learned, and that the ability to praise or love life is its twin skill (Jenkinson, 2016). He agrees with the author's belief that children and young adults should have the opportunity to engage in informed discussions about grief, death, and dying.

Therefore, intentionally developing skills related to death and grief can provide practical tools that allow individuals to respond effectively, regardless of their stage in life.

Viewing grief as a skill can benefit those experiencing bereavement, whether it's our own impending death or the sudden death of people we know. However, relying solely on grief as 'the teaching tool' may not yield the desired results.

Grief skills are more than just coping mechanisms; they are knowledge tools that strengthen mental fortitude. They foster an individual's realization, interaction, response, and awareness, positioning them to be more in control of their response to grief. Embracing this approach empowers individuals to be present during moments of grief, whatever they may entail. Since grief is highly personal, tools (or skill sets) must always be available for recollection, and concrete tools can continue to evolve while providing stability.

Tools for managing grief aim to strengthen resilience, although resilience cannot be standardized since everyone is unique. Acknowledging the need for grief skills enables proactive teaching of said skills.

Resilience can be conceptualized in different ways, but it usually refers to three phenomena: (a) individuals who have experienced traumatic events and have been able to recover; (b) individuals who belong to high-risk groups but have better outcomes than expected; (c) individuals who show positive adaptation despite life stressors (Sen, 1992).

Risk and protective factors shape resilience. Crises can take many forms and can strike without warning. Grief skills can serve as a protective factor by facilitating conversations and creating pathways for handling grief. By doing so, we can become better equipped, less reactive, and healthier, with fewer unintended consequences (Goleman, 2022). Viewing grief as a skill broadens grief learning as a tool for personal development and self-efficacy.

It is important to understand death and grieving and their impacts as early as possible in our lifetime. Relying on incidental learning moments can only bring more stress during an already difficult time. This does not discount bereavement counselling when indicated. Any skill learned during these times can be life-changing in positive ways. We are always cultivating our skills about grief.

Rodríguez Herrero et al. (2021) stated that "we cannot educate for life if we don't take death into account" (p. 2). With the likelihood that young people will experience bereavement before reaching adulthood, it is important to address grieving skills with a positive and healing approach as early as possible during each life development stage. Developing skills early on in life can help us understand death and see healthy ways of grieving, which can guide us through difficult times.

Children and young people have opinions about death education. In an action study conducted by Stylianou et al. (2016), the researchers evaluated "children's views on providing peer support to bereaved children" (p.1). The data, which consisted of pre- and post-interviews and written documents, was analysed for a teacher-researcher and her 16 children aged 10-11 years old. The findings revealed children's ideas on supporting a

bereaved child and how this support should be provided, taking into consideration various factors such as the relationship with the bereaved and the role of memories. The researcher emphasizes that children should have structured opportunities across the whole-school curriculum to learn how loss affects people's lives to support themselves and others.

Furthermore, King-McKenzie (2011) strongly argues in favour of integrating death education into all curricula and for all ages. She states that "children do not have the knowledge or experience that adults have; consequently, they are often unprepared to deal with the death of a loved one or even of a beloved cartoon character in a movie."

It is important for students to learn about the reality of death, and schools can facilitate this learning through their educational process. According to Willis (2002), children can discuss their feelings, but may not use the same words or phrases as adults. Willis also suggests that young children benefit from expressing their emotions through drawing or colouring, even if it is just scribbling (cited by King-McKenzie, 2011).

We cannot rely on incidental death education to provide the necessary skills. By considering grieving as a skill, we can integrate it into societal thinking and provide access to these skillsets in mainstream education. By exploring and explaining grief as a skill, we can normalize it and better equip individuals to deal with it.

Grief Skills - Empowering Professionals

"We study death and dying so we know how to live" (DePaul University Syllabus, 2013). If this is the case, then it is crucial for death education to be covered in mainstream professional learning.

Professionals need to be able to discuss death to provide appropriate information to assist with grief obligations (using the Hippocratic Oath as an example, according to Narayanan, 2017). The professionals who may benefit the most from formal education are medical and health professionals, teachers, funeral directors, journalists, and religious leaders.

Formal death and grief education will build capacity for these professionals to respond with confidence and provide information that informs and supports those in need. Death education equips professional bodies to support grief and reduce the burden they feel when facing intense death and grief in the workplace. While many forms of death education for professionals are already available, they are not yet embedded in undergraduate curricula, and some are more relevant than others (Narayanan, 2017, p.2).

Grief is a common cause of illness and often not recognized. While doctors are well acquainted with death and grief, they report challenges in receiving death education that relates to their work. This lack of training is particularly crucial when handling death and grief situations, from stillbirth (Avagliano, 2020) to end-of-life care. Doctors cite stress in dealing with difficult conversations about death and lack skills training about grief that would enable them to advise or support patients in better practice (Parkes 1998). Redesigning the medical school curriculum would ensure that physicians are better

prepared to discuss death and dying, as well as ensure that seriously ill patients are well-informed (Sutherland 2019, p.6).

Health professionals often have insights into grief and are frequently at the forefront of death conversations, particularly in palliative care settings and some death event circumstances, such as stillbirth. It has been noted that if nurses had more formal awareness of death and grief, it would positively influence their death-related attitudes (Searles et al., 2015). Personal experiences of health caregivers may affect the quality of care given to bereaved parents, due to grief and loss in their own lives. Improved education would provide caregivers with the skills to manage their own trauma during death events at work, as well as support all aspects of sensitive care (Avagliano, 2022).

Counsellors and Chaplains often work with clients to address personal loss and help them process grief-related issues. Recent research has revealed that counsellors would prefer more training in grief counselling skills and theory to better support their clients (Hill et al., 2018). A better understanding of death awareness can help counsellors take a more holistic approach to their work and participate more effectively in early intervention/prevention programs, where they may be the only "expert in the room", especially in settings such as schools and communities.

Teachers in school settings can also play a significant role in supporting bereaved children by providing appropriate support and guidance. However, many teachers report feeling discomfort when discussing death with children and feel inadequately prepared for the task in terms of training (McGovern & Barry, 2000; Papadatou et al., 2002, cited by Martinčková et al., 2018). Their self-perceptions about death and grief can unconsciously affect their attitudes toward death education in schools, as well as how they deliver the education if required. What is taught in the classroom can have a ripple effect on the world (DePaul, 2020).

Many children carry challenging life experiences into their classrooms daily, sometimes overtly and sometimes discreetly (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2013). Childhood trauma can take many forms, including abuse or neglect, witnessing violence, and the death of a parent or loved one. Despite the overwhelming frequency with which bereaved students are present in classrooms—70% of participating teachers in one survey taught students who recently experienced the loss of a loved one (American Federation of Teachers and New York Life Foundation, 2012)—teachers continue to feel unprepared, reluctant, and even resistant to engaging students in talk about grief in the classroom (Mahon, Goldberg, & Washington, 1999, cited by Husbye et al., 2019).

In addition to the many benefits of teaching students about losses, the literature often mentions teachers perceived insufficient preparation to deal with these topics (Cunningham et al., 1989; Pratt et al., 1987, according to Reid et al., 1999; Reid et al., 1999; Hogan et al., 1994; Patterson et al., 2010; Broberg et al., 2005, according to Dyregrov et al., 2013; McGovern et al., 2000, cited by Martinčková et al., 2018). Teachers from Quebec and Ontario consider these to be important topics but express a lack of confidence in participating in such conversations when asked (Survey-Engarhos et al., 2013). A survey conducted in the Netherlands also found that 59% of school staff somewhat or completely

agree with the statement that they know too little about helping ways to support students who have experienced loss (Dyregrov et al., 2013).

The current research highlights reasons for discussing the concepts of loss and grief with children, including their interest in further discussions, incomplete knowledge about the concepts, inevitable experience of loss and bereavement, and their involvement in such experiences.

Funeral Directors, Journalists and Religious leaders are major influencers in our community's rituals, perceptions about death and grief, and grief actions, often being at the forefront of death events and commentary. They need access to modernized death and grief professional development programs. This will ensure they are culturally sensitive and equipped to have conversations that help those in need. They are well-positioned to be a part of the social solution to death phobia and stigma. By taking the lead, advocating for improved grief-skill learning, they can share their first-hand experiences, dispel myths, and help improve the situation.

It is absurd that death education is absent from these professionals' curriculum currently, highlighting how death taboo has affected curriculum development. Although treating death as a part of life is hard, it may help ease some of the fear and confusion linked with it (Stanford Hospital USA 2022). This barrier could easily be turned around.

Grief Skills - Empowering Individuals

Empowering individuals with grief skills must include younger people and children. By maximizing health literacy around adolescent grief in the community, consulting with young people themselves, promoting resilience and wellbeing, and exploring youth-friendly methods of engaging bereaved adolescents in healing opportunities, we can improve their emotional and social wellbeing (Dunsmore, 2001).

Recent studies suggest that a short and targeted education program that incorporates an approach that enables a child to raise with teachers their own questions can "develop knowledge of death and grief, and that this impacts on children's ability to understand and engage with these experiences: thus, building death literacy" (Stylianou et al., 2018).

During literature lessons on a text that covers death and dying, King-McKenzie (2011) discovered that young people attending found the text helped allay their fears of death. She concludes that senior "schools should be proactive in preparing students by giving them information on death and dying before they are in panic and distress mode from traumas" (King-McKenzie, 2011, p.9).

Schools as a Setting

Topics related to mortality and loss have been marginalized in school settings for various reasons and are often considered inappropriate (Lundgren et al., 2010). Adults often try to shield children from these topics to protect them (van der Geest, 2015; Hulbert, 1999; cited in Veronika, 2021). However, schools can provide an environment for children to gain a realistic perspective on death and other losses, as well as support in grief. Several authors

stress the importance of including these topics in school curriculum (Andriessen et al., 2001; Chagnon et al., 2007; cited by Testoni, 2020). Yet, there is a lack of such education in schools worldwide (Wass, 2004). Only a few schools in America, for instance, have pre-defined programs where staff teach students about death and loss (Wass, 2004). Although some researchers caution that discussing these topics could increase fear (Mueller, 1975, cited in Bailis et al., 1977), many others highlight the positive effects.

Wells (1995, cited by Higgins, 1999) suggests that every situation should be seen as an opportunity to talk to children about losses, to gain a deeper understanding of them. Hulbert (1999, cited by Veronika, 2021) states that teaching about death may help students integrate their losses into their experiences. Lee (2009) found that teaching about death to preschool children results in a greater understanding of this complex concept. Other research has shown that teaching can help children reject false beliefs about death, reduce their fear, help them face violence and death in the media, and promote adequate contact with peers who are going through the grieving process (Testoni et al., 2020, p.8; Worden, 1996, cited by Tracey et al., 2008; Durant, 2018).

Fenwick et al. (2018) state that mental health promotion programs focusing on resilience and coping skills have positive impacts on students' ability to manage daily stressors (p.3).

We recognize that young people and children should be taught skills related to grief. Willis (2002) notes that American children are raised in a culture that avoids grief and denies the inevitability of death, a trend that is seen worldwide. Children are growing up in a world where death, dying, and violence have become synonymous. Death is rarely discussed in schools, except when it occurs as a national trauma or disaster, such as the massacre of children in schools.

The question of whether a curriculum on death and dying should be included in schools is debatable. It may take many years for classroom curricular development to be accepted, depending on how thanatology is integrated into professional standards and practice. This is the challenge we face.

Death is one of the most emotional and complex matters an individual can experience during childhood (Slaughter & Griffiths, 2007). While the discussion of death often happens in the home, bereaved families may be absorbed by their own grief and unable to provide the emotional support children need (Papadatou, Metallinou, Hatzichristou, & Pavlidi, 2002, cited by Engarhos et al., 2017). In addition to home, young children are already being exposed to death through various forms of media in their communities, schools, and unsupervised home environments (Aspinall, 1996; Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2021). Hence, the need for formalised death education as a resource for young people is viewed as imperative.

Relatedly, research has shown that the type of support provided to children during a period of mourning significantly affects their bereavement experience. This emphasizes the importance of providing developmentally appropriate bereavement support and death education to children (Papadatou et al., 2002). Past research has also found that when children's grief reactions are not adequately addressed at school, their relationships with

teachers and peers may be negatively affected, leading to poor academic performance and behaviour problems in the classroom (Papadatou et al., 2002, cited by Engarhos et al., 2017).

Schools have been hesitant to teach subjects related to death and grief due to societal taboos. A mainstream death education curriculum in schools is viewed too as difficult. The themes and approaches have not been discussed at the curriculum development level and with no tertiary leadership for professional trained staff to received formal education in the pedagogy, barriers continue for death education to be introduced as a regular subject content, despite set reading texts being often associated with the topic.

There are positive trends for death/grief education and philosophy emerging worldwide. There are also grief education alliances and professional education collaboratives reported across Europe, USA, and Canada, which is further promising.

Though not yet mainstream, we are seeing favourable school curriculums developing across the globe, even if at the trial stage. There has been a push recently for death literacy to be introduced in schools especially, although they have often remained in research or pilot mode. The literature has identified various approaches to death literacy in those educational settings that have adopted positive outcomes and reported minimal unintended harm (Mind Matters, 2020; Roderego-Herrero, 2020; Stover, endorsed by Edutopia, 2020; Testoni et al., 2020, p.8; Paul, 2019; Stylianou et al., 2016, 2018; Katayama, 2002).

Thus, we should aim to do more to "support teachers with professional development so they can feel confident and competent to teach death and grief skills in their schools" (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2021). If we are to move forward with school curriculum development in this arena, teachers need to be better informed so they can participate with confidence. Educators "require a heightened awareness and a clear understanding of what is required to foster student resilience as a prerequisite to mental health promotion in schools" (Tucker, 2016).

Therefore, taking a systems approach to incorporating death education into teacher training is crucial. This should involve providing formal death education in undergraduate programs alongside any proposed professional development. Research has shown that death education can act as a protective factor for both teachers and children of all ages. Consequently, it is essential to train teachers in this area to build their confidence and enable them to deliver effective programs, whether they be personal development focused or elective subjects. Further, young people and children have expressed a desire for more education on death and grief, with the knowledge that it could help them better handle these difficult situations (Engarhos et al., 2013; Stover, 2019; Stylianou et al., 2016, 2018). This feedback also extends to learning about funerals (Selman, 2021, cited by Kumar, 2020).

We cannot afford to leave grief skills to chance, especially with the potential for misinformation on the internet or trauma. Therefore, it is vital to regulate mainstream education on this topic to ensure the best possible evidence and support is available and implemented.

Public Access

An accessible grief skills toolkit can ensure that no one is left behind or disadvantaged. While schools can assist by making grief skills accessible, not everyone goes to school. There are also generations that would benefit from grief skills as the impacts affect all ages.

Individuals of any age should be able to access grief skill learning if they believe they are ready to learn, especially young people. Providing a public access point for individuals to learn grief skills would translate to mental health equity. This platform can also be engaged with, promoted, and supported by communities. Businesses would also benefit. Too often, they are asked to manage crises without the necessary skills, and many are unfamiliar and lack the confidence when it comes to creating a compassionate workplace for bereaved individuals returning to work.

Death and grief affect everyone at every age, and thus an accessible generic framework for building grief skills will provide for the first time a mental health promoting program that builds resilience on an individual's terms. Death education can also involve families as participants. Families can learn together, as they often know the best time for their children to have open and supported conversations about death. They just need the platform to assist them. For too long, non-professionals have been invisible in this skill-building process.

Getting this approach right is especially important in the current pandemic/epidemic environment (COVID-19, 2022), where complex and prolonged grief is becoming the greatest mental health epidemic of our time (Kumar, 2021). Sadly, many are dealing with grief on their own.

Grief support is time-sensitive, and bereavement support is not always available when needed. Grief skilfulness is not designed to replace counselling but provides a trauma-informed framework of skills that can support grief before an event occurs, in addition to cultivating grief skills in real-time.

Having practice and feeling comfortable with standardized grief skills can improve grief agency and efficacy, or "relief." Teaching about grief before it occurs brings meaning and allows time for a person to integrate mind-tools that support much of the grief experience, which is not limited to death but also includes life's meaning. A grief toolkit brings readiness to the bereavement experience and helps when reaching out to others.

Although grief may not have a universal impact, it may have some predictable effects on people. Rando (1988) suggests that people respond to grief and loss similarly to how they have lived their lives. This implies that some individuals may be more resilient than others. However, humans have the capacity to change, and learning to respond to grief and loss more skilfully can be developed. Working with grief is like physical health, in that it takes effort to get strong and maintain strength. Dr. Cacciatore writes that, "Just like exercising muscles, adjusting to loss and integrating grief comes as a result of exercising emotional muscles...slowly, over time, the weight isn't as difficult to carry" (Cacciatore, 2013).

Often, we postpone our personal growth, assuming that we will always have time to improve ourselves in the future. However, life is finite. The Japanese Buddhist concept of "Shoji", which refers to death, encourages us to consider life and death as two sides of the same coin. Just as we consider how to live, we should also consider our death. Thinking about our own mortality can motivate us to achieve more, wasting no time in helping ourselves to reach our full potential.

It is acknowledged that grief can be part of a person's growth and personal awareness and is not always a negative experience in the long term. However, if we were more prepared for it, grief could bring even more meaning and purpose to our experience. For most, it will be at least a painful but bearable experience, and we can continue to work and function with the understanding that our pain will ease. However, for others, it can bring intractable impacts and change their lives forever.

We can live our lives without being burdened by intense grief. This idea does not deny the existence of grief; rather, it suggests that we approach grief with preparedness, skilfulness, and awareness. By being less fixated on negative emotional reactions to grief, we can respond in more powerful and positive ways that can help others through the healing process, as well as ourselves.

SECTION FOUR

THE LIGHTSOUT PROGRAM

Facing Grief with Self Determination

Individuals in our western society often face barriers when it comes to building skills and coping with grief. LightsOut is an organisation that responds to this need. Its vision is to make death an accepted and discussed part of life, where grief is embraced and understood.

As grief is a unique experience (Chin 2018), LightsOut actively gathers and makes public those relevant resources about death and grief literacy to further empower, inform and educate people's concepts about death and grief.

Grief, like death, is a part of life, yet it is rarely taught as part of mainstream curriculum. Instead, we rely on incidental moments to learn about it. By teaching grief as a life skill at an early age, we can draw on our strengths and build resilience to face death and bereavement in healthy and informed ways. Grief skills can empower our responses to death and provide us with a toolkit for life.

*"Grief, in many ways, is all the love you wanted to give the person that has gone.
It never leaves your heart."*

Fay Reynolds 2022

It's okay to acknowledge that grief is a difficult journey, and an integral part of our human experience. By becoming more aware of our personal relationship with death and grief, we can better navigate challenging times. These tools help us with self-determination, building our capacity to reframe our reactions to death and grief.

Unfortunately, Death Education (Thanatology), is not yet widely available formally, however we can empower ourselves, and those around us, in other ways. We can learn about strength-based tools that expand our skills, increase knowledge, and enhance awareness about death and grief. This improves our death literacy and resilience overall.

Resilience is the ability to cope and thrive in the face of negative events, challenges, or adversity, with the ability to bounce back. Although controversial in definition, LightsOut accepts psychological resilience as being defined by five pillars: self-awareness, mindfulness, self-care, positive relationships, and purpose (Oxford Dictionary, Emmy Werner 1970s). Resilience is not a fixed state, but rather a journey that we take with others, drawing on their strength when we feel challenged.

LightsOut Principles

Founded by Bianca Becker (CEO), LightsOut is for all age groups, created with the vision that individuals will flourish as they learn skills that support their mental health literacy (Keyes 2002), in the context of grief. Relevant to individuals, community groups and workplace contexts, its especially directed to young people between the ages of 16-30 years.

LightsOut emerged from the Founders Lived Experience of grief as she responded to people's needs like hers. As a result of extensive personal reflection, research, and

consultation, various evidence informed positive psychology tools that support grief as a skill have been put forward.

LightsOut takes the lead for conversations about the importance of grief literacy. As an organisation it provides educational resources that work to better inform and guide us especially when we are faced with grief or when helping others who are grieving.

The Business aligns with Public Health Strategies that empower and enable individuals to take charge of their health (Ottawa Charter 1986). Its activities inform positive wellbeing and mental health (Keyes 2002, 2007).

LightsOut is a grief education platform (the Program); focusing on personal development skills, it brings together a suite of evidence-based tools that can support us when we face grief. The online platform is interactive, assisting individuals to develop their personal strategic toolkit of skills. The Program is a key focus for opening up conversations when discussion is invited.

LightsOut has developed its School Curriculum (the Curriculum); providing schools a model designed to enhance the Program by facilitating peer support and age-appropriate activities (16-18 years age) that maximise its key messages.

LightsOut promotes death education and inclusive grief skills as a protective factor for human survival and resilience. Its principles are based on the belief that death should be an accepted and openly discussed part of life, and that embracing grief as a skill will lead to a better understanding of grief (Becker, 2021). These beliefs have been further reinforced by the literature which has confirmed that people experiencing grief felt they needed to know more about death and grief to help them understand their reactions, and that if this education was available early in life it would have prepared them better (Martincekova et al.2018).

Lived Experience as Central Focus

Based on the Founders own testimony, the Program facilitates a personalized interactive analysis of our grief skill needs, utilising evidence-based positive psychology through the lens of Lived Experience. It includes asking the question "what happened to you" (West-Olatunji, 2022) on a personal level. For those who have not yet experienced grief, the context may differ, but it is still important to consider. Lived Experience gives us the best chance to reform the grief industry. Acknowledging the importance of Lived Experience can bring a trauma-informed lens to our understanding of grief.

Young People are Priority

It is estimated that 1 in 20 children under the age of 18 experience grief following the death of a parent. This tragedy is a long-term public health issue with impacts long reaching and life changing. It is associated with depression, poor education outcomes, and complex grief. Furthermore, many adults who experienced the death of a parent at a young age have experienced consistent negative impacts on their mental health. A follow-up study after a 7-

year interval, for example, revealed a 2-year peak in certain depressive disorders (Lancet, 2022).

Given the long-lasting impact of parental loss, LightsOut prioritizes young people by providing an accessible individual learning platform that promotes and supports self-led/paced learning. Additional focus on schools is considered another priority.

Access for All

In addition to supporting young people, grief tools should be accessible to individuals age 16+. By ensuring the platform is in the public domain, individuals can access this education at their own pace. Professionals and Educators can also use LightsOut to develop themselves professionally.

Accessible for School Curriculum

LightsOut self-led e-learning is available to anyone over the age of 16. Schools can enhance the learning experience by funding a curriculum program developed by LightsOut. The Program facilitates learning and reflective practice, providing a safe and supportive environment for younger individuals.

Curriculum Development Advocacy

Prioritizing curriculum development to guide professionals will take time. Until we resolve this major stage of formal education, we need a multifaceted approach to Death Education made available. This will enable professionals to be more confident in delivering and promoting grief skill education.

LightsOut will collaborate and work on known pathways of academic and philosophical learning so that the potential outcomes of grief skilfulness can be available, accessed and embedded in academic tertiary curriculum. To address this issue, LightsOut encourages all relevant professionals to complete the Program as a first response to equip themselves with better information and skills. This bridging of the curriculum will create a death-aware and grief-skilled workforce possible. There is also potential for partnering with scholars and Curriculum Developers.

Grief Education Program Framework

LightsOut offers a suite of evidence-based tools on one accessible platform. By building foundational skills that include practical tools, we can cultivate positive mental health in our own time and personal space. The skills that support grief - gratitude, acceptance, self-compassion, perseverance, realistic expectations, empathy, mindfulness, and meditation form the basis for healthy grief responses aimed at deepening our self-awareness and subsequent understanding.

With knowledge comes choice, but there are no guarantees when it comes to developing mental strength - whether in thoughts, behaviors, or emotions. However, we know that

improvements in one of these areas will positively affect the others, as they are intertwined (Morin, 2014).

The Framework for LightsOut has been developed through Lived Experience and organized into modules covering the following themes:

- Strengths: exploring positive ways to view oneself, and utilizing strengths to our advantage even during difficult times
- Beliefs: reflecting on life and death, and living with gratitude
- Emotions: taking action and supporting others
- Empathy: understanding how people feel
- Self-care: practical ways to stay true to oneself during times of crisis
- Helping others who grieve practical ways to support others without burning out
- After Death: including funerals
- Self-Awareness: reflecting on the meaning of death and grief, utilizing grief tools, and thinking about our own altruistic legacy.

Strengths & Goals

When you utilize your strengths, you feel more confident, competent, and are more effective in achieving long-term goals. However, few have taken the time to determine what their strengths are. It's not as simple as identifying what you're already good at. You must analyse the characteristics and motivations that make you unique, going beyond just your skills and talents (Seligman, 2011).

Long-term goals reveal a lot about who you are, where you're headed, and what you value. They are the big dreams that give your life direction and purpose (Lynn Christian, Soul Salt Inc. Coach, 2022).

LightsOut builds upon this foundation by developing skillsets over time, with a focus on positive strategies during difficult times. The strengths model builds confidence and competence as we reflect on things we may have previously overlooked, or avoided, especially when we were younger.

Reflecting on your strengths and goals empowers you, research shows that it can increase meaning in your life and productivity. It's a good theme to underpin the LightsOut Program, as it gives you a sense of agency over your life.

Beliefs

LightsOut provides us with increased awareness about how to live our lives with meaning. To feel comfortable talking about death, it's important to understand what death means to us. This knowledge helps us be empathetic. It helps us understand why some people grieve the way they do, and this helps us to better support them.

When we have contact with death, we are also interacting with others and their belief systems. As everyone has different concepts and experiences of death and grief, it's

important to understand how our views of death differ. While we can't change someone else's beliefs, we can talk about differing perspectives and learn from each. This extends to understanding and learning a variety of other people's rituals, helpful grieving processes, and culturally diverse practices that can confirm or liberate one's views and beliefs.

LightsOut develops a skillset that promotes reflection and understanding about grief as a journey and builds the self-confidence necessary to alleviate fears about death and dying. This idea is a belief, reinforced by literature (Chin, 2016). When we think about how we want to live, we can shape the legacy we want to leave when we die and ensure we are living our best life.

*"The value of our lives does not hinge on how long we live,
but how we use the time that has been granted to us".*

Masuno 2019

Emotions

Reflecting on belief systems and the tasks associated with grief and mourning can improve an individual's experience of grief and help them support others. The LightsOut Program aims to identify practical ways to grieve in a healthy way by increasing our knowledge about what constitutes healthy grief emotions. It unpacks the evidence-based cognitive behavioural and neuroscience tools that positively impact life skills supporting grief and death. Empathy, relaxation techniques, meditation, and mindfulness are all key elements and skills that underpin the program's skillsets for facing death, dying, death, and grief. By doing this, we can prepare for grief when it occurs and "build strength in the midst of grief if we are grieving at this time" (Walsh and Shapiro, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2012; Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008).

Unpacking your consciousness is a journey. LightsOut aims to create focus on areas where you can build self-awareness. By doing this, you can embrace and harness the energy for emotional understanding - your own emotional reactions as well as others - bringing some balance into your emotional and mental health. Mental strength status can underpin many of our reactions in ways that help us to express our true emotions without draining us.

The Program's mental health tools are core standard tools in mainstream counselling arenas. Leading experts help us learn these tools, which are placed as a pathway for building our strengths. Reinforcing our emotional health and connecting to our emotions can take time as they need to be internalized. Once practiced and reflected upon, they become more readily available as a skill.

Emotional skills relate to self-awareness (being conscious of your own feelings - putting you in charge), self-management (self-control - managing one's response to threats - planning and strategy, being mindful - creating emotional balance), social awareness (focusing on empathy, collaborating on helping and being helped – being aware of people and the environment socially with purpose), and relationship management (Goleman's reflection - El KornFerry.com 2020). These skills can be valuable for life.

Empathy

LightsOut includes empathy tools because empathy plays a positive role in helping us understand ourselves and others. By putting ourselves in other people's shoes, we can take a step back and see things from their perspective, which can help us understand how they might feel. This often leads to insights that allow us to respond rather than react.

Empathy develops significantly from middle childhood to adulthood, forming part of a broader prosocial personality trait. According to McDonald and Messinger (2011), the development of early prosocial behaviour, such as empathic concern and perspective taking, motivates helping behaviour.

Self-care

LightsOut helps identify tools to support ourselves and increase awareness about our safety and the safety of others. Everyone needs to be reminded of self-care, especially during difficult times of grief. It's normal to feel numb and overwhelmed with grief. That's why LightsOut emphasizes helpful ways to care for us as well as others, while also acknowledging the importance of how setting boundaries can further support us and reduce burnout.

Helping Others

LightsOut helps us develop a list of ways we can assist others during any difficult time, particularly grief. Knowing how to support someone in grief is crucial, and LightsOut highlights some of the key aspects of positive and helpful behaviour and that what we say can help us to better show up for the ones we love.

“Be there. Listen. We must have our pain witnessed “

David Kessler 2022

After Death

“Funeral services are related to the vital interests of human beings and are supposed to meet peoples social, psychological and spiritual needs” (Tan et al. 2023). The Program provides increased understanding about preparing for and interacting with funerals. It delves into the complexities of the processes that we often face after death. Rather than just discussing theory, it shows the practical aspects of funerals and all the processes that may need to be considered.

By becoming familiar with the many options available for celebrating our lives, we can also begin to consider how we would like to be celebrated. That said, Funeral systems can be complex.

By building the tools around Funerals, we intend to inform, explore, and embrace a broader way of saying goodbye by opening conversations about funerals, funeral planning, wills,

eulogies, and reflecting on one's own legacy. In doing so, we can help those left behind cope with our own death. We can be 'present' even in our death memorial.

Personal Death Awareness

LightsOut concludes the e-learning program by bringing together the range of skills learned as a toolkit. We reflect on the meaning of death, the tools for coping with grief, and making sense of it all. Additionally, we encourage participants to think about their altruistic legacy.

Next Steps

As a global platform, LightsOut has been created for the betterment of society. We aim to make death an accepted and openly discussed part of life, where grief is embraced and understood.

Grief is a personal and unique journey. The positive long-term objectives of LightsOut aims to improve individual self-reliance and resilience, mental health and well-being, and practical coping strategies for handling grief. Our goal is to bring hope and personal empowerment through all LightsOut interactions.

As the platform grows with its participant base, there will be further iterations. Feedback will be collected and analysed to ensure that our audience are catered for. Those with Lived Experience will help shape the program over time.

We will continue building death literacy potential by:

- **Speaking** engagements
- **Creating** videos, podcasts, and other multimedia resources to increase access to death literacy
- **Collaborating** with those with Lived Experience and actively seeking resources that build understanding and awareness about suicide bereavement
- **Connecting** with services that offer practical assistance for working through tough emotions, such as art, music, and dance therapy, and broadening public access to their online workshops
- **Developing** further tools, including a LIVING WILL (a Will that you can build on over time, reflect and redirect - based on your current thoughts and ideas)

LightsOut aims to provide additional support for young people who are actively grieving or want to access grief skills. We will tap into research opportunities to help develop a modern Death Education syllabus. We will collaborate globally with experts to build capacity and capability for accessible grief skills worldwide.

*“We have lost a part of ourselves with them,
but we have gained the part of them that they shared with us”.*

Worden 1997

SECTION FIVE

FOOTNOTE

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Dalya Shaw - <https://www.dalyashaw.com.au/>

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Kelvin Chin, Overcoming the Fear of Death Foundation - <https://www.overcomingthefearofdeath.org/founder;>

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