

Compassionate Companionship: Navigating Grief Together

In Honor of National Grief and Bereavement Day 2023



Host: Diana Vincze, Pallium Canada

Presenter: Matthew Fillier, B.A., M.Div

Date: 24 November 2023

Territorial Honouring



The Palliative Care ECHO Project

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is a 5-year national initiative to cultivate communities of practice and establish continuous professional development among health care providers across Canada who care for patients with life-limiting illness.

Stay connected: www.echopalliative.com

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is supported by a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.



LEAP Core

- Interprofessional course that focuses on the essential competencies to provide a palliative care approach.
- Taught by local experts who are experienced palliative care clinicians and educators.
- Delivered online or in-person.
- Ideal for any health care professional (e.g., physician, nurse, pharmacist, social worker, etc.) who provides care for patients with life-threatening and progressive life-limiting illnesses.
- Accredited by CFPC and Royal College.



Learn more about the course and topics covered by visiting

www.pallium.ca/course/leap-core

Introductions

Host

Diana Vincze, Palliative Care ECHO Project Manager

Presenter

Matthew Fillier, B.A., M.Div

Grief and Bereavement Practice Lead

Palliative Care Network, Nova Scotia Health

ECHO Support

Aliya Mamdeen, Program Delivery Officer

Welcome and Reminders

- For comments, please use the chat function
- For questions, please use the Q&A function, these questions will be addressed at the end of the session
- This session is being recorded—this recording and slide deck will be emailed to registrants within the next week.
- Remember not to disclose any Personal Health Information (PHI) during the session.

Conflict of Interest

Pallium Canada

- Non-profit
- Partially funded through a contribution by Health Canada
- Generates funds to support operations and R&D from course registration fees and sales of the Pallium Pocketbook

Host/Presenter

- Diana Vincze: Nothing to disclose
- Matthew Fillier: Nothing to disclose



Compassionate Companionship: Navigating Grief Together

Matthew Fillier, B.A., M.Div

Grief and Bereavement Practice Lead
Palliative Care Network, Nova Scotia Health

After our session you will be able to:

- Increase grief literacy
- Understand the science of grief
- Identify grief myths, stigmas euphemisms and platitudes
- Offer supportive alternatives
- Use evidence-based approaches
- Grieve *well* instead of *right*



It's OK if You're Not OK

Things to remember:

1. Your experience matters
2. Find a comfortable space
3. Self-care and compassion
4. We are all learners
5. The grief expert is you



“Our silence about grief serves no one.
We can’t heal if we can’t grieve; we can’t forgive if we can’t grieve.
We run from grief because loss scares us, yet our hearts reach toward grief
because the broken parts want to mend.

C.S. Lewis wrote, ‘No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.’
We can’t rise strong when we’re on the run.”

- Brene Brown, Rising Strong (2017)

Background & Grief Story

Compassionate Companionship

My Grief, Background & Role

I wonder...how grief shaped your life?



Palliative Care - Canada

BY



Hold the Baby In the Bereavement



Relationship With Vs. Stages of Grief

Bianca Neumann Head of Bereavement
(Sue Ryder, UK www.sueryder.org)

Hold the Baby In the Bereavement

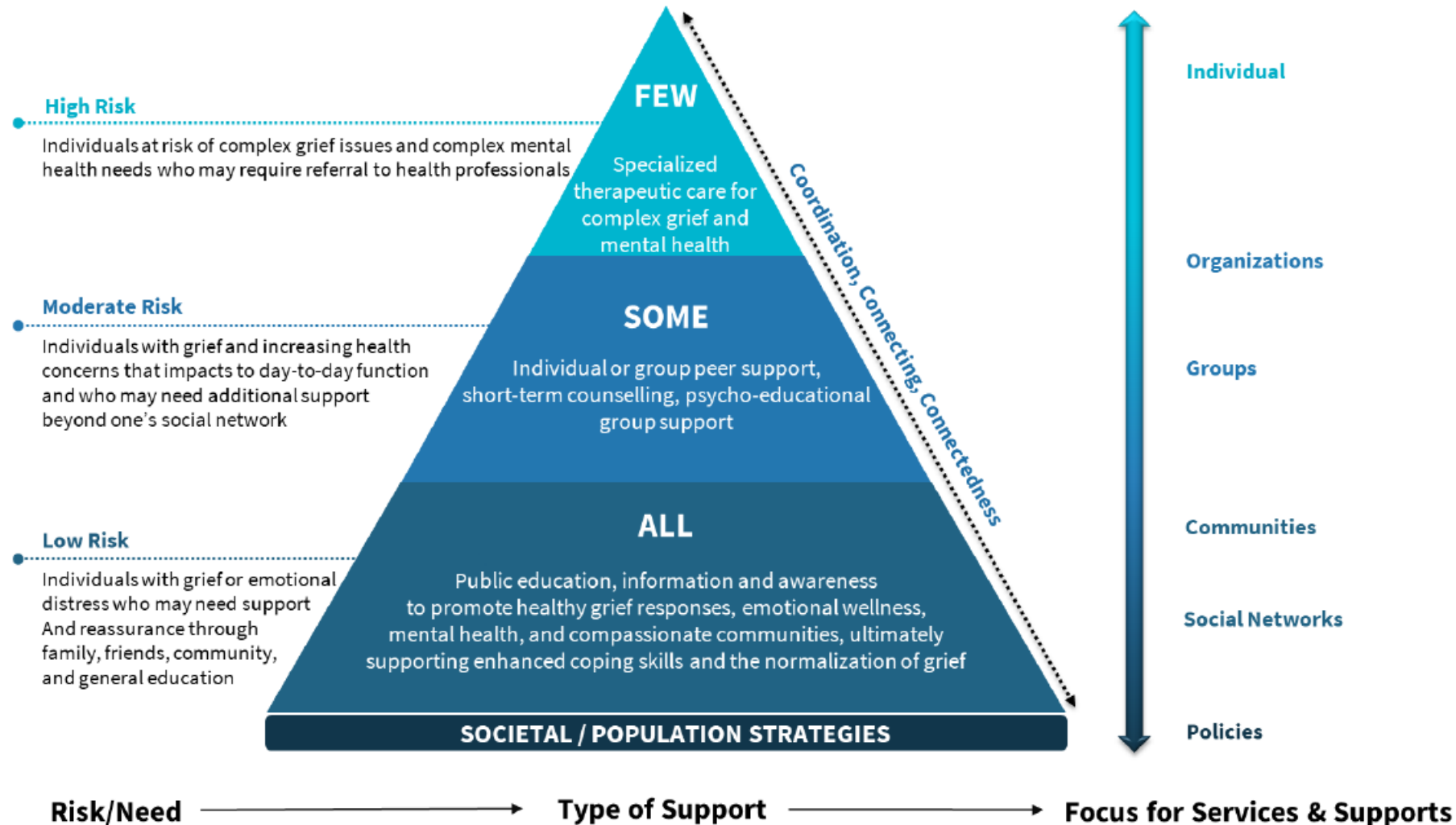
- How Would We Respond?
 - Thoughts & Prayers?
 - What Stage Are You?
 - A Card with ETA of Back to Work?
 - Is Our Response In Relationship with the Grief That's Showing Up?
- Replacement is the Displacement of Emotion
- If we aren't grief literate, we're probably not grieving well
- What if we assume people are doing the best they can with what they have to work with?
- Anyone's ability to cope is dependent on a very diverse set of factors

Canadian Grief Alliance



- How would that baby develop? Trauma, Relationships, Attachment, Coping and Resilience skills?
- 10,083,726 - Tracking the number of Canadians grieving a COVID related death 2019*
- Conservatively it is estimated that each death directly impacts 5 people - or 1,466,400 million Canadians.
- This doesn't include impacts on extended families, friends, workplaces, schools, communities.

NS Bereavement Care Pyramid



NS Bereavement Care Pyramid

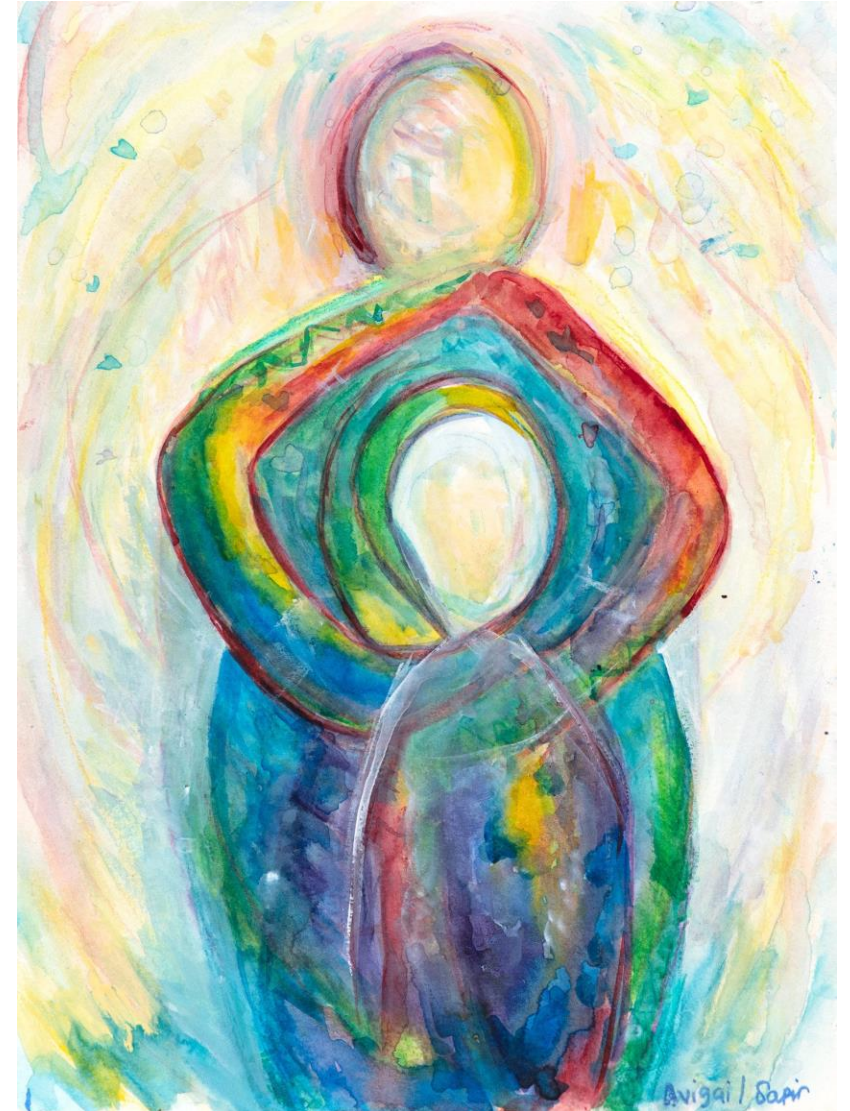
- Grief is non pathological
- Only a small segment of the population requires clinical or therapeutic intervention
- Evidence suggests that a proactive model approach that focuses on prevention, and collaboration between community networks and professional services, the majority of grief needs can be met at a community level
- Grief is both individual and universal

Hold the Baby in the Bereavement

Question:

How might this metaphor change our relationship with our grief?

- Everyone grieves - it's not pathological
- People do the best they can with what they got to work with
- Each person has a unique experience of their grief
- Let's check our assumptions & ground ourselves
- The grief expert is the person who is grieving
- Listen to understand, not to fix
- Don't ask what's **wrong with** someone - ask **what's happening to** someone



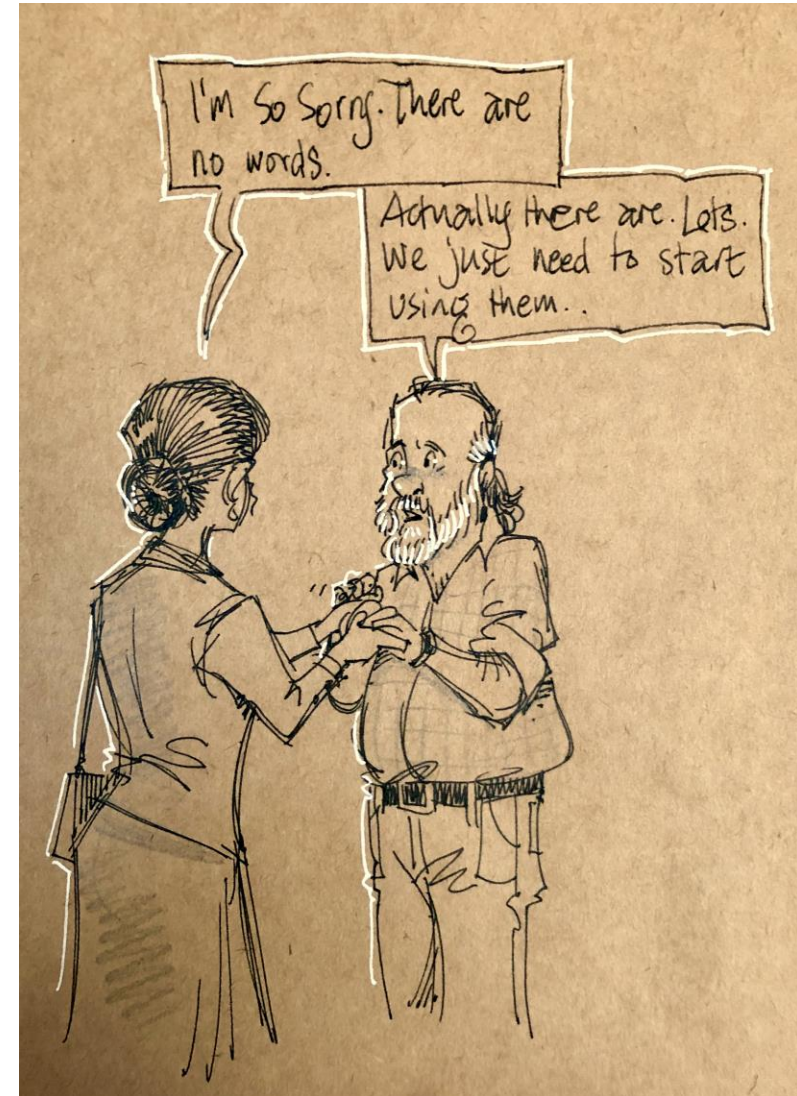
Hold the Baby in the Bereavement

The **NURSE** approach:

- **Name** how someone described their grief/feeling (“I feel overwhelmed.”)
- **Understand** instead of fixing (“There’s a lot happening right now – how can I help you?”)
- **Respect** their experience (“I don’t know what you’re going through, and I think you’re so courageous to face this.”)
- **Support** the griever (“I want you to know you’re not alone in this. Can I keep checking in with you?”)
- **Explore** with open ended questions (“What’s the most important thing for you right now? What’s the hardest part?”)

Grief Talk

Loss
Secondary Loss
Grief
Secondary Grief
Complicated Grief
Anticipatory Grief
Disenfranchised Grief
Cumulative Grief
Bereavement
Anticipatory Mourning
Mourning
...and more and more...



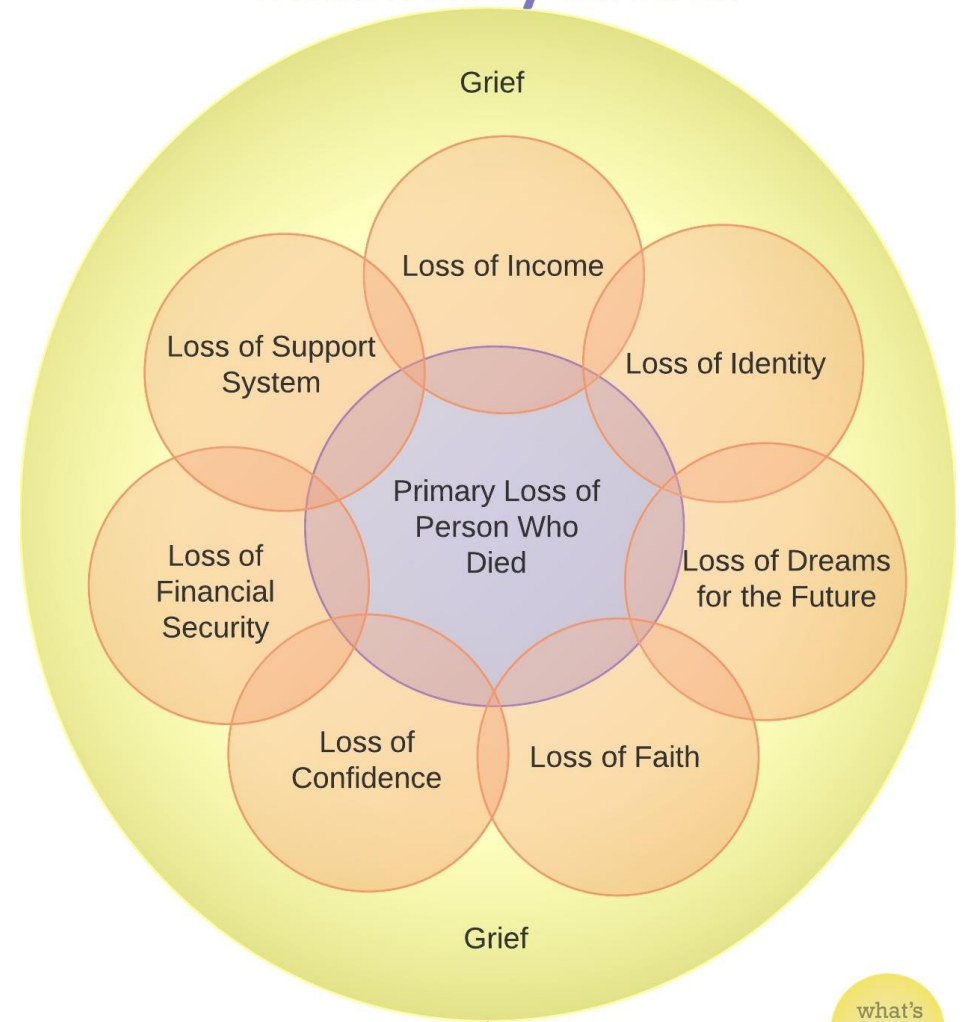
@garyscribblor

Grief Talk: Loss

Loss - Trying to name the experience that someone or something meaningful that was once present to us, and is now painfully absent

- It can be validated by others, or not
- It is valid by the person experiencing it
- It happens to everyone. We will all experience loss in life
- Death is a kind of loss: "I lost my mom"

Secondary Losses



<http://whatsyourgrief.com>

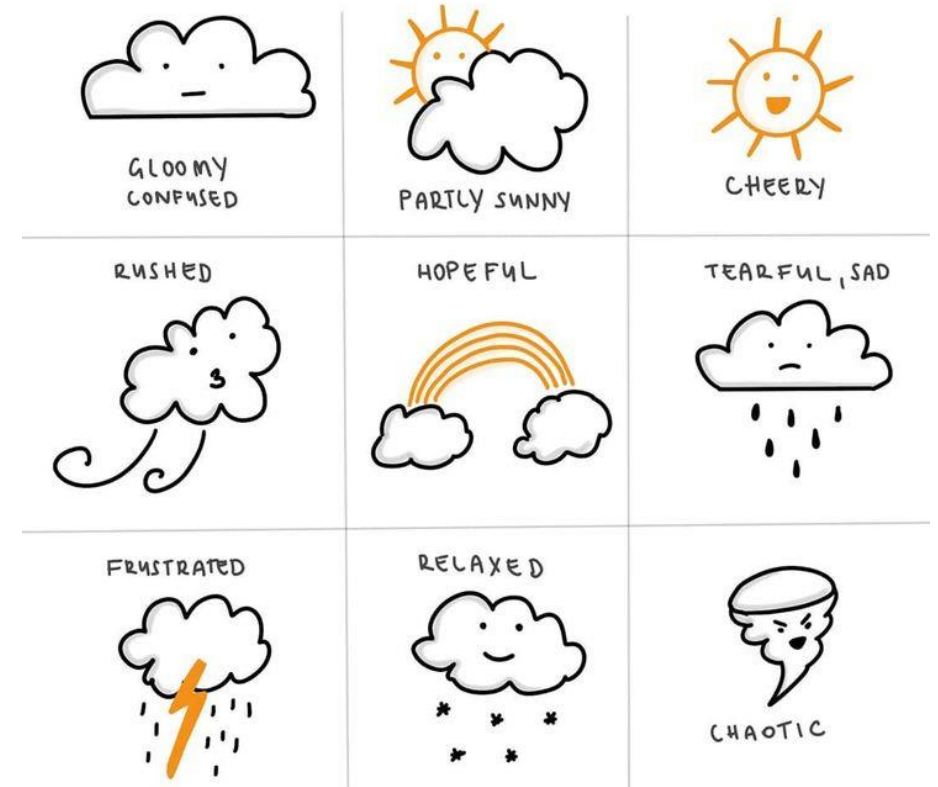
what's
your
grief?

Grief Talk: Grief

Grief - an embodied response to loss.

- is multi-dimensional in that it affects all of life's domains: physical, emotional, behavioural, social, financial, and spiritual.
- is the emotional response to a loss or trauma.
- is a constant part of lived experience and the normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind.
- is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder.
- is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.

emotional WEATHER

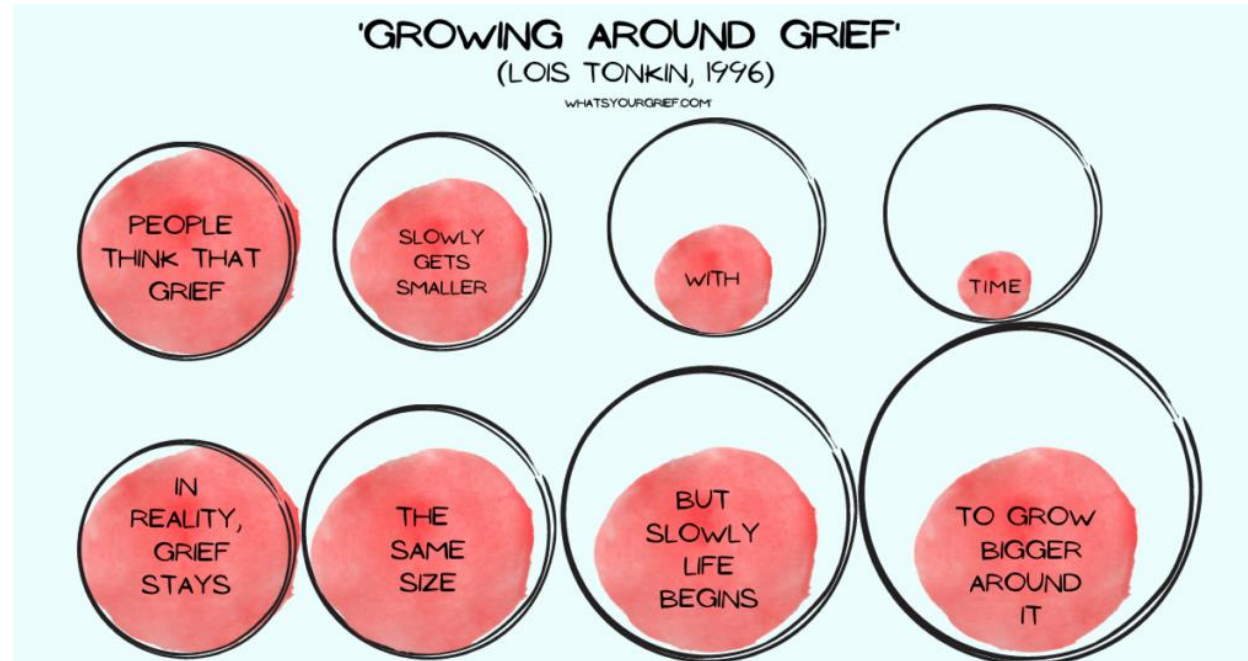


Grief Talk: Stages of Grief

- Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross described these five stages of grief (you will find models with more stages)
- Although referring to death, can apply to all types of loss
- Not discrete and well defined
- Not chronological
- Not everyone will experience all of them
- They ebb and flow into one another and can stop and start



Grief Talk: Grief



- You can grieve the loss of anything significant to you
- Grief is not a predictable process with a set timeline and endpoint
- No two people grieve in exactly the same way
- Grief is multifaceted (domains of life)
- Coping with grief takes many shapes

Grief Talk: Stress Response

- Stress response: Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Ancestral Brain scanning for threats
- Your autonomic nervous system decided for you before you can even think and revs up your body to react
- **Fight/flight** - Muscles tense up ready for action, body floods with adrenaline, heart races, blood flow increases, lungs expand.
- **Freeze** - Nervous system switches to freeze, Vagus nerve immobilizes - paralyses our muscles so we don't move and shuts off our ability to physically feel
- All losses are threats of one kind or another



Grief Talk: Complicated Grief

SYMPTOMS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF

People respond very differently to traumatic events, such as a death, often making it difficult to identify signs of debilitating grief.



Source: Mayo Clinic

Grief Talk: Complicated Grief

Complicated Grief - Sometimes grief becomes complicated and bereaved survivors remain acutely distressed, finding it difficult to get through the day for years after the loss.

- This occurrence is known as Complicated Grief and can occur when death is from natural causes in older years, but is more common in the case of sudden, shocking loss of a loved one
- Gives voice to unexpected death and grief including:
 - sudden death without warning, the death of one's child, death in horrific circumstances, occasions when the body is not recovered, multiple deaths, suicide, death due to violence, death due to the fault of others, from carelessness or negligence, deliberate homicide

Grief Talk: Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief - grief that is not acknowledged by society, by the healthcare culture, or by individuals.

Includes Four Types:

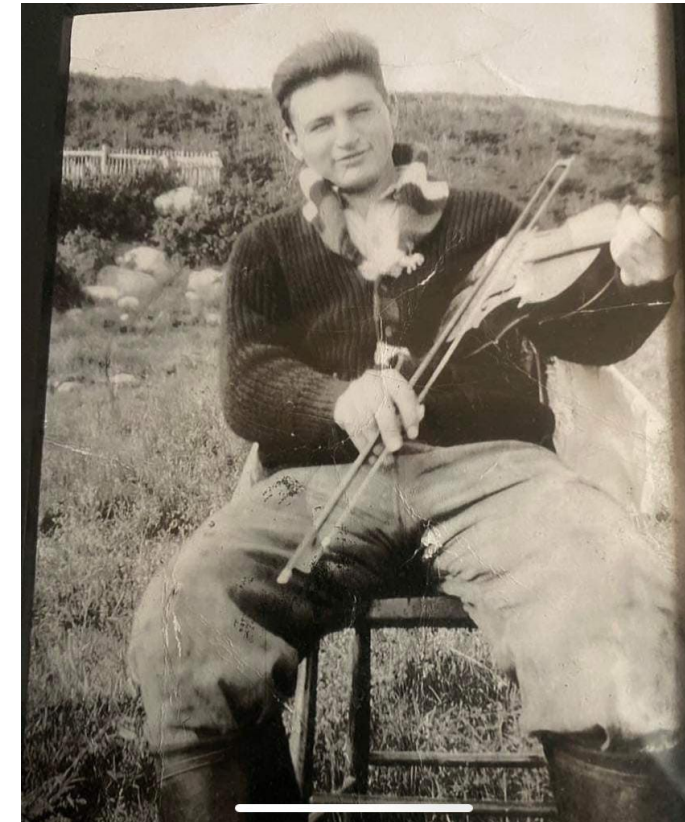
- 1) the relationship is not recognized
- 2) the loss is not acknowledged
- 3) the griever is excluded
- 4) the circumstances around family members' deaths are deemed socially unacceptable, for example, suicide, AIDS, or the death of children



Grief Talk: Disenfranchised Grief

- Can you grieve someone you've never met? YES!
- Grief isn't disenfranchised until it isn't acknowledged - relationship is so important
- Grief and Cultural Safety
- Continuing Bonds - developing a set of memories, feelings, and actions that keep one connected to the person who died rather than presume detachment is the goal.

Today marks 50 years since your passing
I wonder what you were like
Were you funny and sarcastic?
Were you quiet and kind?
What would you have been like as a Grandfather...
What would you have been like as I grew up loving you
as much as I did my Grandmother
I know you would be proud of my dad....and I can only
imagine what you would have thought of your
grandchildren and great grandchildren 💙
We've never met, but I've heard many great things about
you and I believe that after many years, you're in great
company 🧡



Grief Talk: Bereavement

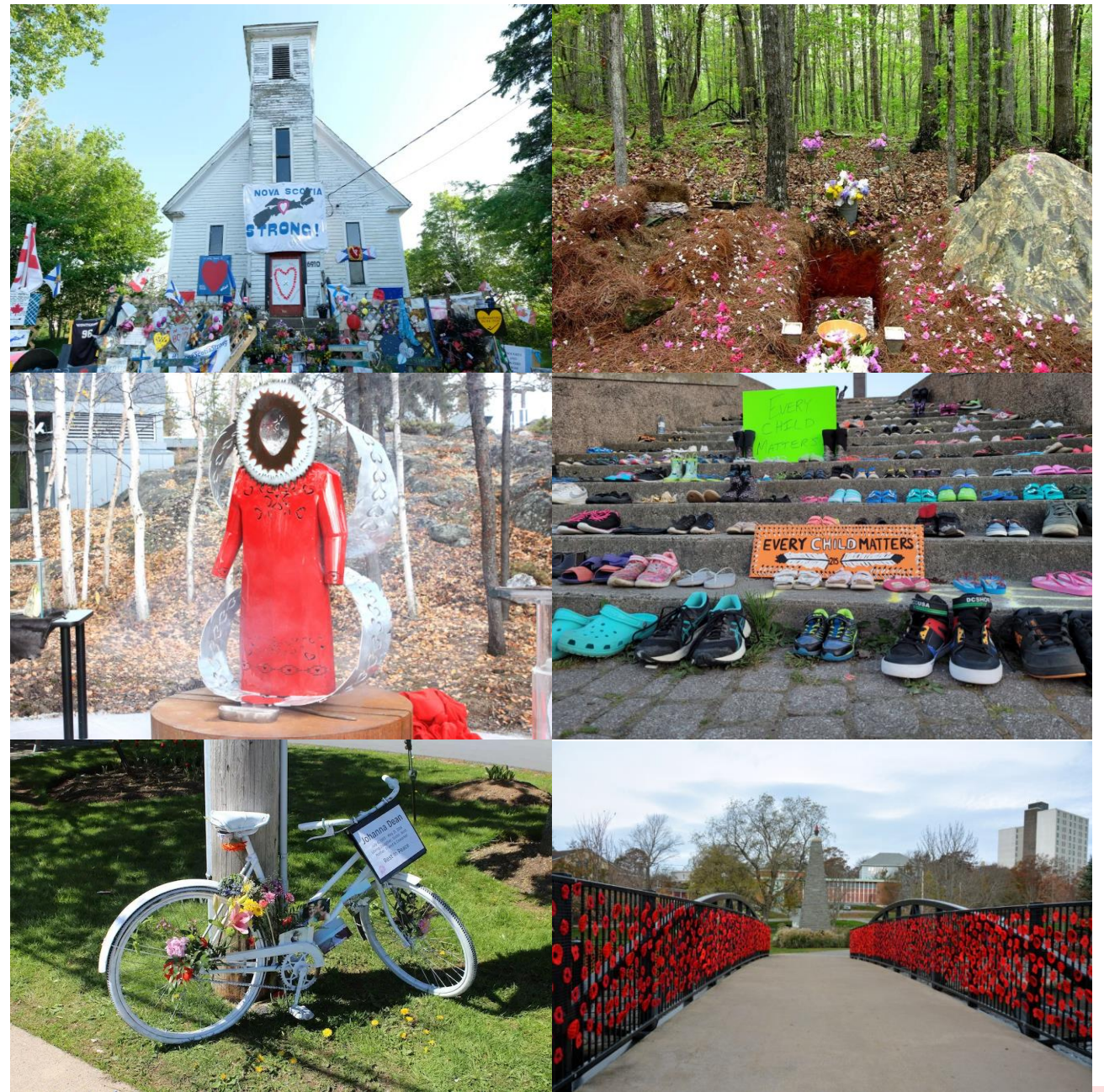
Bereavement: Comes from the word “bereave” which has the same root as the word “rob”

- The state of having suffered a loss of someone or another living thing that you have a meaningful relationship with (Person/Animal)
- Can the bereaved be grieving? YES! 😊

Grief Talk: Mourning

Mourning - the way we show grief in public.

- is affected by beliefs, religious-spiritual practices, and culture.
- Grief and mourning are closely related.



Grief Talk: Myths, Stigma, Euphemisms, & Platitudes

"Grief sucks."

~Everyone Ever



www.whatsyourgrief.com

Grief Talk: Grief Mythology

- **MYTH:** The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.
- **Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only worsen it in the long run. It is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it for natural healing.
- **MYTH:** It's important to be "strong" in the face of loss.
- **Fact:** Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

Grief Talk: Grief Mythology

- **MYTH:** If you don't cry, you aren't sorry about the loss.
- **Fact:** Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.
- **MYTH:** Grief should last about a year.
- **Fact:** There is no right or wrong timeframe for grieving. How long it takes can differ from person to person. Grief doesn't go away – it can become a part of our lived identity in an insightful way.

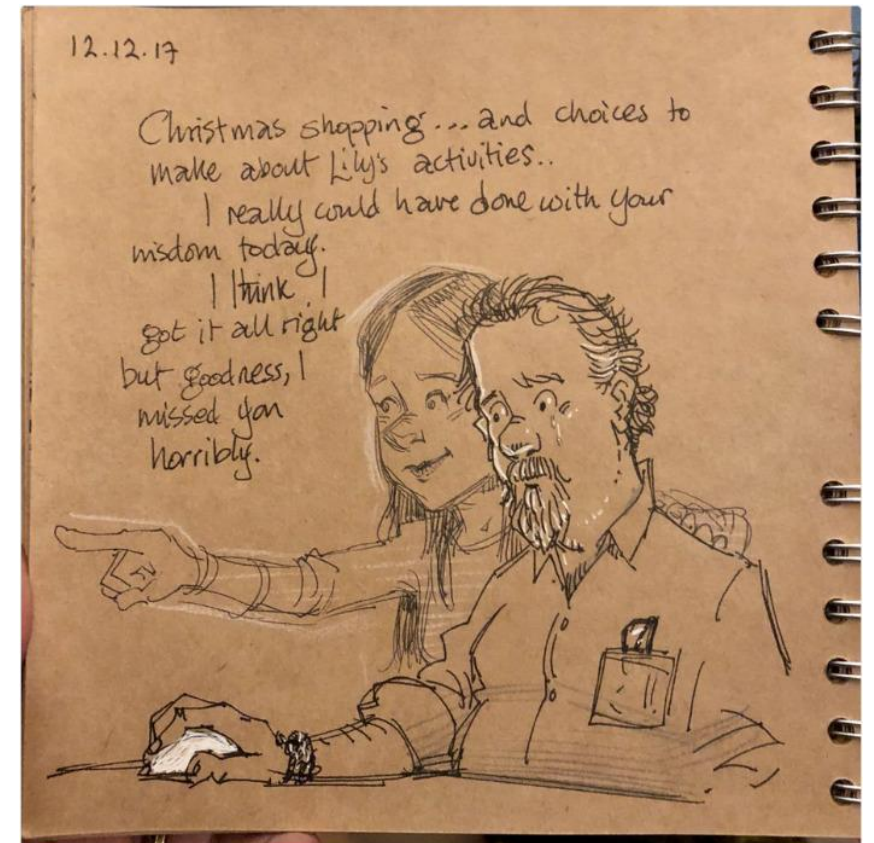
Grief Talk: Let's Stop the Stigma

- **Statements that imply blame** - "What did you think would happen to a drug addict?"
- **Statements that inspire shame** - "Don't be depressed. No one likes people who are depressed."
- **Statements that minimize or diminish the importance of the loss** - "There's plenty of other fish in the sea."
- **Statements that discourage grief** - "Calm down. Call me back when you're not crying."
- **Statements that make grief seem abnormal or unhealthy** - "I don't want to be mean but, move on. It's time."
- **Statements that bypass pain** - "Don't be sad. Tomorrow's a new day and you should count your blessings."
- **Statements that put undue pressure on someone** - "You need to be strong for the children now that she's gone."
- **Statements that imply weakness** - "Stop feeling sorry for yourself, you're being selfish!"

Grief Talk: Euphemisms

Euphemisms- gentle or vague words used to describe something considered unpleasant or shameful so that we can avoid using the actual word, which is considered too harsh or rude or nice or polite

Death - Passed away, lost, at rest, rest in peace, gone to a better place, "I'm sorry for your loss"



Gary Andrews
@GaryScribbler



Tough day today [#doodleaday](#)- tears never far from my eyes and often spilling out.

11:45 PM - Dec 12, 2017

♡ 40 👤 See Gary Andrews's other Tweets

Grief Talk: Euphemisms

- More about our discomfort than comforting the griever
- You lose keys, your phone, a wallet - two options: find or replace.
- Death is a permanent state. There is no replacing them - no one is putting up a lost poster.
- Death can often be a shocking, shattering, life altering event - it could be the most painful moment of someone's life.

Grief Talk: Platitudes



Platitudes don't help that much.
Here's a cute picture of a kitten instead.

Dictionary

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

 plat·i·tude
/'pladə,tōd/

noun

a remark or statement, especially one with a moral content, that has been used too often to be interesting or thoughtful.

Grief Talk: Please Push Past Platitudes

- Time heals all wounds
- Everything happens for a reason
- What doesn't kill you makes you stronger
- God needed another angel
- It's all part of God's plan
- I know how you feel
- Treasure the good times
- They're in a better place
- They're not in pain anymore
- Remember, someone always has it worse
- How are you?
- Call me if there's anything I can do
- There's always a silver lining
- You are never given more than you can handle

Grief Talk: Platitude Take Aways

- Platitudes only work when we've misunderstood correlation and causality
- Being intentional about the difference between the two can make be the difference between harm and healing
- Sometimes your support system isn't that supportive - people mean well, and it's ok to draw boundaries.
- Sometimes we can locate the heart of earnest compassion regardless of how it is received
- What if we assume people are doing the best they can with what they have to work with?
- Sometimes a griever can give someone a break, and sometimes a griever needs a break from someone 😊

Grief Talk: Boundaries, Empathy & Compassion

Boundaries are a prerequisite for compassion and empathy. We can't connect with someone unless we're clear about where we end and they begin. If there's no autonomy between people...(there's) just enmeshment.

Empathy is connecting with people so we know we're not alone when we're in struggle. It is a way to connect to the emotion another person is experiencing; it doesn't require that we have experienced the same situation they are going through.

Compassion as the ability and willingness to empathize without judgment and face pain. It requires looking at your own actions with understanding...and doing the same for others.

Grief Talk: Please Push Past Platitudes

- Say the person's name—forever and ever—and keep saying it for the rest of the griever's life
- "I am so sorry."
- "I can't imagine what you are going through" or "I can't imagine..."
- "I miss him/her/them, too."
- "Thank you for having the courage to share that with me."
- "It's not your fault."
- "How can I support you in this moment?"
- "I have been thinking about you and want you to know I care."
- "I was remembering that time..."
- "I wish I had known him/her/them" or "I'm glad I've gotten to know him/her/them through you."
- "It's good to see you" or "What did you do today?" or "What have you found that seems to help?"

Things We Can Do to Cope

Physical

- Exercise
- Yoga
- Run
- Stretch
- Restorative Practice
- Movement
- Other

Emotional

- Cry, Yell, Vent
- Look at old photos
- Tell stories about the person
- Write a letter to them
- Start a gratitude journal
- Express anger, love
- Other

Connection

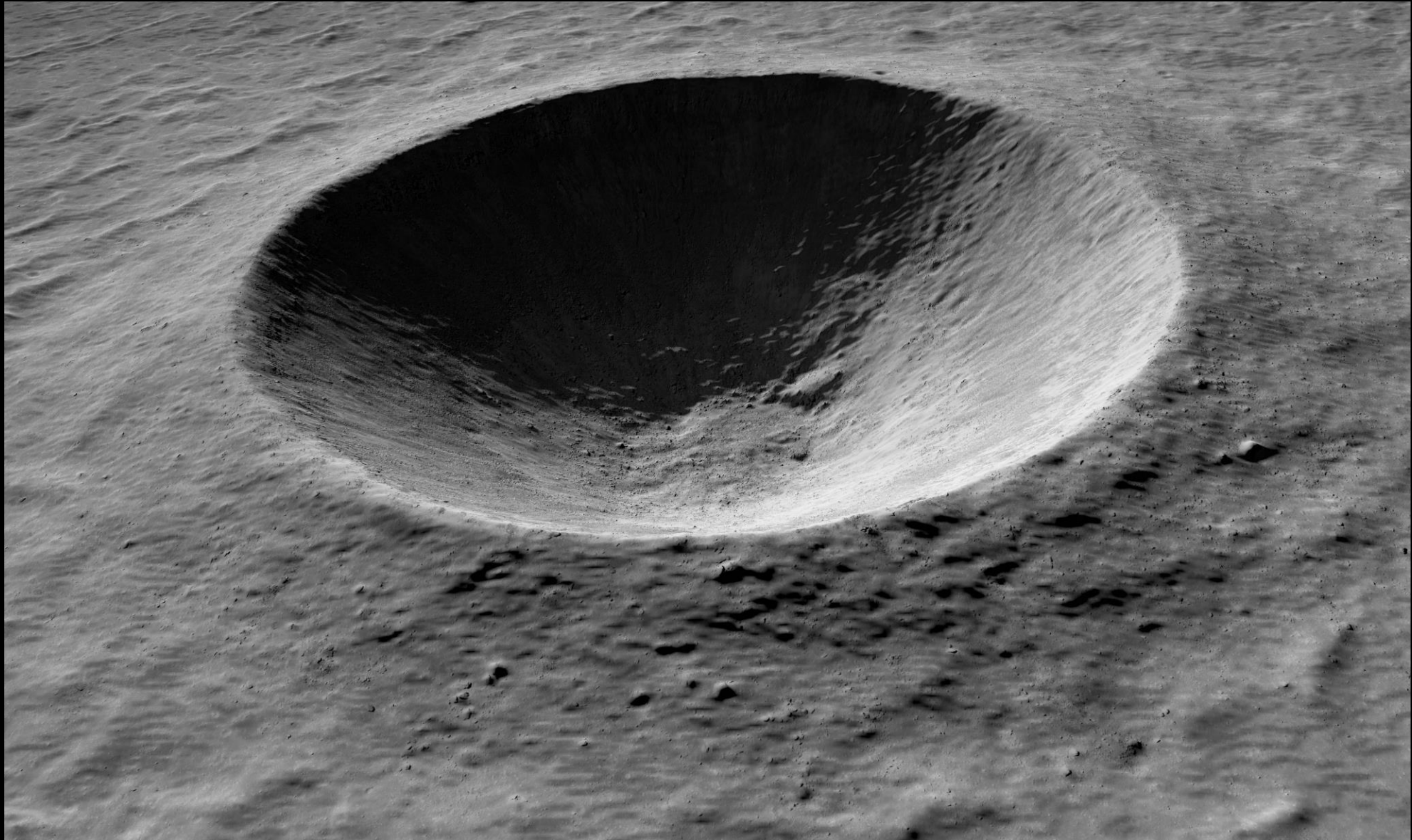
- Self compassion
- Peer Groups
- Virtual Gatherings & Support Groups
- Send a card
- Check on someone
- Death Café
- Other

Insight

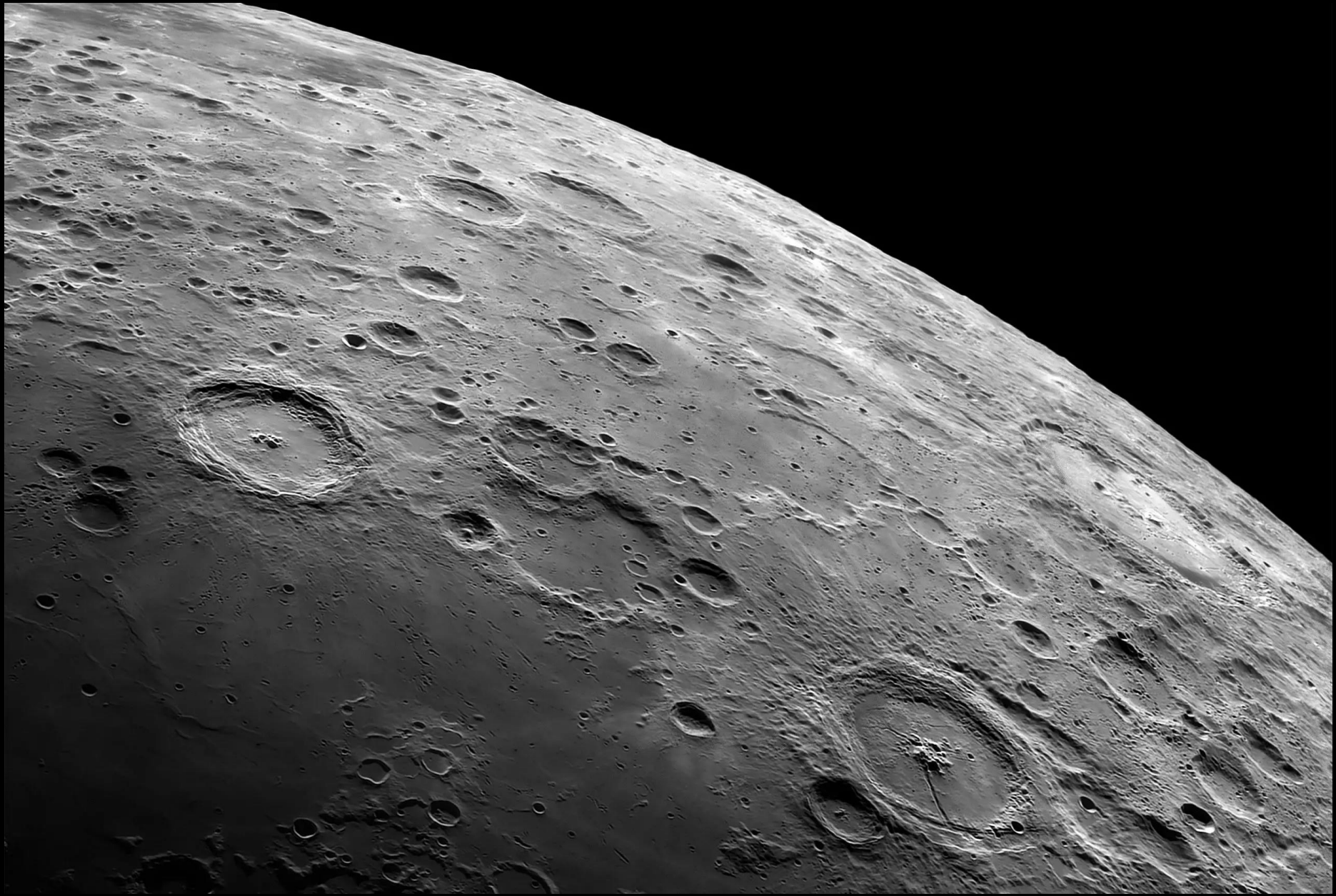
- Write Your Grief Story/Poetry
- Paint Music
- Online Course
- Therapy
- Read
- Other



The Crater of Grief: A Closing Metaphor











Thank You 😊

Matthew Fillier, B.A., M.Div
Grief and Bereavement Practice Lead
Palliative Care Network, Nova Scotia Health

Resources

Grief Books:

- When Life Hits Hard: How to Transcend Grief, Crisis and Loss with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2021) Russ Harris
- What's Your Grief? Lists To Help You Through Any Loss (2022) Eleanor Haley, Litsa Williams
- The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses including Health, Career, and Faith (2009) John W. James and Russell Friedman
- It's OK That You're NOT OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand (2017) Megan Devine
- Resilient Grieving: How to Find Your Way Through A Devastating Loss (2017) Lucy Hone
- Death Interrupted: How Modern Medicine Is Complicating The Way We Die (2022) Blair Bigham

Resources

Trauma Books:

- Walking the Tiger: Healing Trauma (1997) Peter A. Levine
- The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma (2015) Bessel Van Der Kolk

Website Resources

Remembering For Good: Wholehearted Living After Loss: <https://rememberingforgood.com/>

Self-Compassion – Dr. Kristin Neff : <https://self-compassion.org/>

What's your Grief - A Grief Website for the Rest of Us: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/>

www.griefmatters.ca

www.virtualhospice.ca

Bereaved Families of Nova Scotia (bfocb.ca): <https://bfocb.ca/>

Dying With Dignity Canada | It's your life. It's your choice.: <https://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/>

Grieving - CMHA Nova Scotia Division: <https://novascotia.cmha.ca/documents/grieving/>

Appendix:

Slide 17: [national-grief-response-proposal-eng-fin.pdf](#) (canadiangriefalliance.ca)

Slide 18: Irish Hospice Foundation. (2020). *Adult Bereavement Care Pyramid: A National Framework*. <https://hospicefoundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Adult-Bereavement-Care-Pyramid-Booklet.pdf>

Slide 20: Oates JR, Maani-Fogelman PA. Nursing Grief and Loss. 2022 Sep 18. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2023 Jan-. PMID: 30085531.

Slide 23: Lauren J. Breen, Daisuke Kawashima, Karima Joy, Susan Cadell, David Roth, Amy Chow & Mary Ellen Macdonald (2022) Grief literacy: A call to action for compassionate communities, *Death Studies*, 46:2, 425-433, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2020.1739780](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1739780)

The Grief Recovery Handbook: the action program for moving beyond death, divorce, and other losses (20th anniversary expanded edition) (2009) The Grief Recovery Institute, John W. James and Russel Friedman

Slide 26: *When Life Hits Hard: How to Transcend Grief, Crisis, and Loss* by Russ Harris (2021)

Slide 27: Asist Trauma Care UK ([ASSIST Trauma Care | Working together from trauma to recovery](#))

Slide 28: Steven Spidell, Annemarie Wallace, Cindy L. Carmack, Graciela M. Noguera-Gonzalez, Crystal L. Parker, Scott B. Cantor, "Grief in Healthcare Chaplains: An Investigation of the Presence of Disenfranchised Grief," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 17:1-2(2011): 76.

Slide 29: *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* 1996) Edited by Dennis Lass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman.

Slide 31: National Cancer Institute, United States ([Grief, Bereavement, and Loss - NCI \(cancer.gov\)](#))

Slide 33: *What's Your Grief: Lists To Help You Through Any Loss* (2022) By Eleanor Haley, and Litsa Williams

Slide 38: Brene Brown ([Atlas of the Heart | Boundaries are a prerequisite for compassion and empathy. - Brené Brown \(brenebrown.com\)](#), [Brené Brown's Empathy Definition & Attributes | Shortform Books](#), [Integration-Ideas_Empathy_092221-1.pdf](#))

Slide 40: *What's Your Grief: Lists To Help You Through Any Loss* (2022) By Eleanor Haley, and Litsa Williams (p.186-189 for complete list)

Q & A

Session Wrap Up

- Thank you for joining us!
- Please fill out the feedback survey following the session—a link has been added into the chat

Thank You



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