

# Lessons of Loss: Grief and Bereavement Theory and Practice



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# Land Acknowledgement



**TREATY 4**

**TREATY 4**



**1874**

**1874**

# Acknowledgement of my Teachers



- Clients – our greatest teachers
- Colleagues – palliative care team and my social work colleagues
- Grief “gurus” –  
Robert Neimeyer, John Jordan, Janice Nadeau,  
Joan Halifax, Bill Worden, Therese Rando,  
Dale Larson, David Kessler, Ken Doka,  
Frank Ostaseski

# Goals of Today's Talk



- Deepen understanding of what grief is (and what grief isn't)
- How to be present and support those who are grieving
- How to care for self while supporting bereaved individuals

# My philosophy of care



- Innate ability to heal
- Openness – no expectations
- Reserve judgement
- Fix – Help – Serve
- Importance of presence
- Importance of connection – Compassionate Communities

We live in a world where loss is inescapable.

Dale Larson, Ph.D.





We are  
mortal  
beings  
hardwired  
for  
attachment.

Bob Neimeyer





Attachment-Informed  
**GRIEF  
THERAPY**

*The Clinician's Guide to Foundations and Applications*



PHYLLIS S. KOSMINSKY AND  
JOHN R. JORDAN

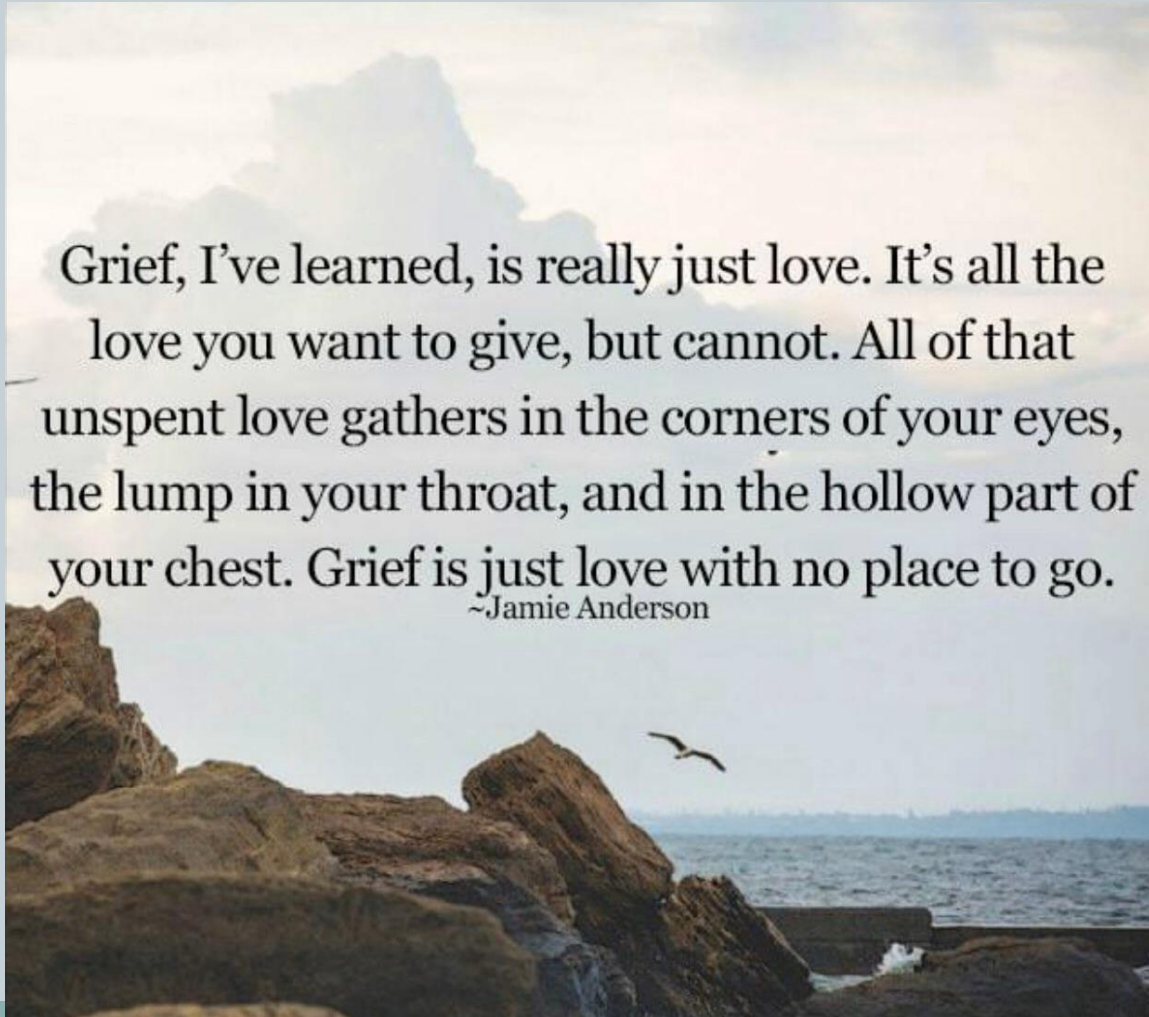


# What Is Grief?



Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All of that unspent love gathers in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in the hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

~Jamie Anderson



The background of the central text area is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a gradient of warm colors from yellow to orange, and the water below is dark with some white-capped waves in the foreground.

**Loss is the absence of something we  
were once attached to. Grief is the rope  
burns left behind, when that which is  
held is pulled beyond our grasp.**

Stephen Levine

quotefancy

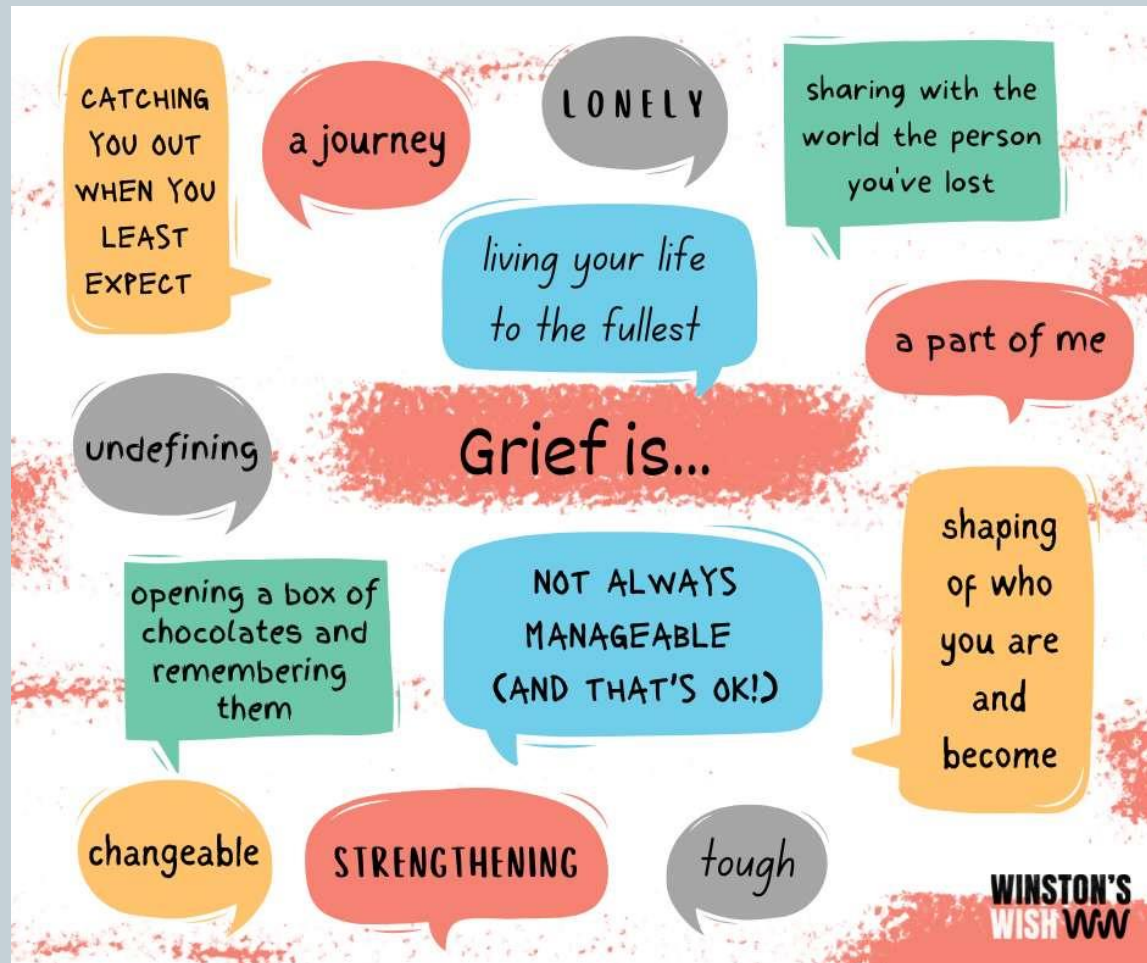


“The process of grief is the transition from losing what you have to having what you lost.”

Stephen Fleming



<https://www.winstonswish.org/what-is-grief/>



# Speaking Grief documentary



- <https://speakinggrief.org/documentary>

From the website:

*Moving away from the idea that grief is a problem that needs to be “fixed,” **Speaking Grief** validates the experience of griever and guides those wishing to support them.*

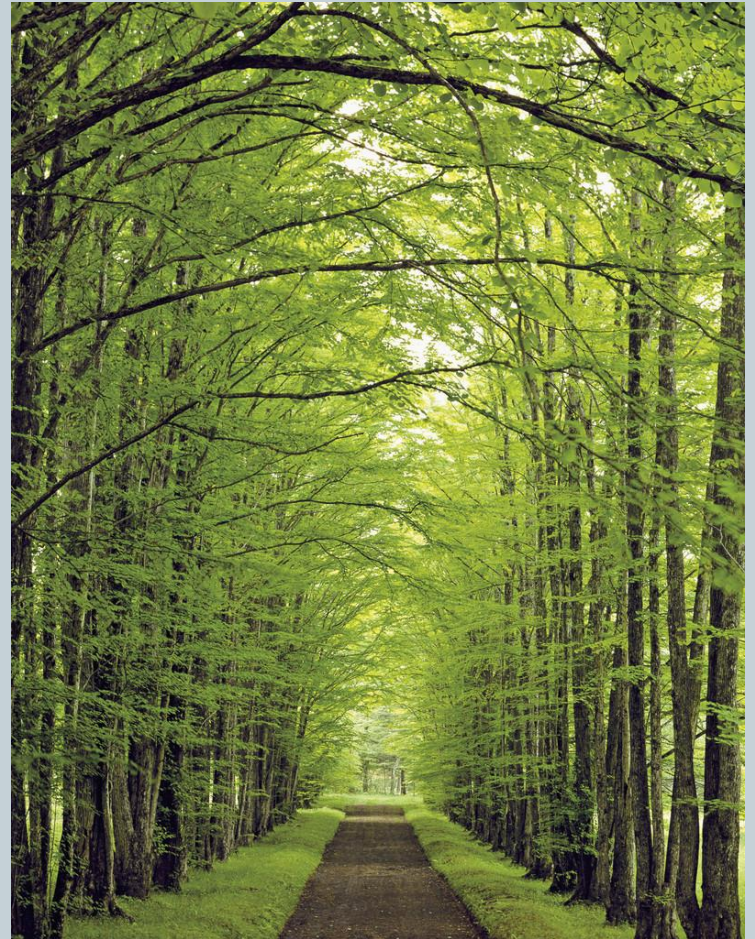
*There is no “right” way to grieve. By sharing diverse representations of bereavement, **Speaking Grief** illustrates that grief is a universal, yet individual experience.*

# Myths of Grief

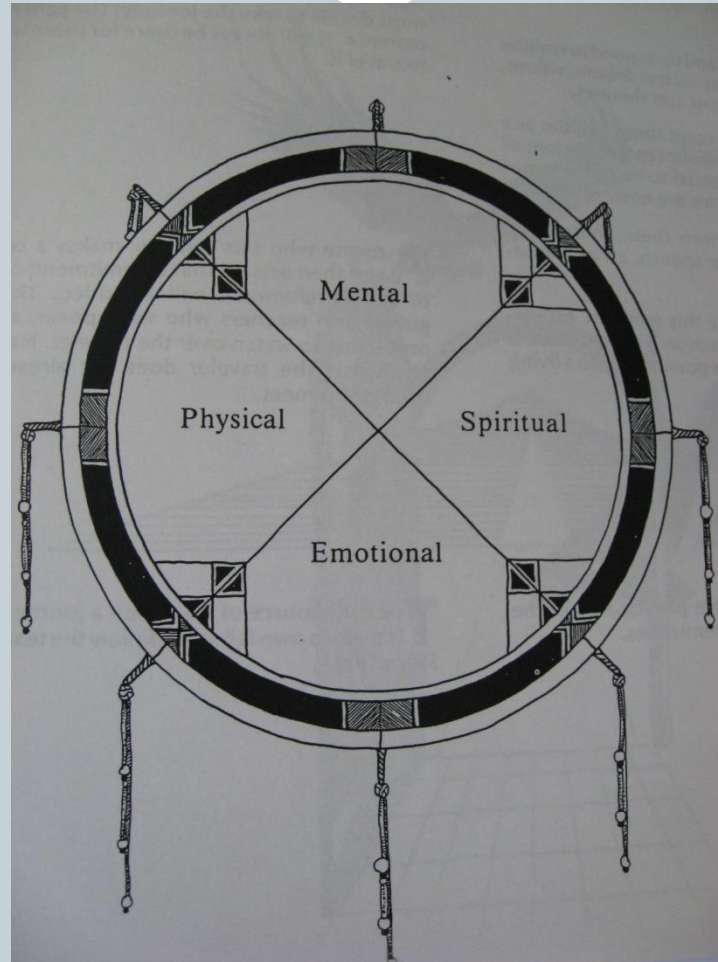
<https://whatsyourgrief.com/64-myths-about-grief-that-just-need-to-stop/>



- Grief has an endpoint
- Once you're done grieving, life will return to normal
- There is a consistent and predictable timeline for grief
- The first year is the worst
- Time heals all wounds
- You recover from grief like you recover from a cold, it gets a little better every day until it completely goes away
- If you aren't crying, then you aren't grieving
- ...



# Manifestations of Grief



# *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis



No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.

There are moments, most unexpectedly, when something inside me tries to assure me that I don't really mind so much, not so very much, after all. Love is not the whole of a man's life. I was happy before I met H. I've plenty of what are called "resources." People get over these things. Come, I shan't do so badly. One is ashamed to listen to this voice but it seems for a little to be making out a good case. Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all the 'commonsense' vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace."



# Grief and the Body

## Teresa Lewis, Psychologist



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFf3cRT4lnk>

Video gives comprehensive overview of grief and the body.

# Grief and the Brain: Mary Francis O'Connor



*The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss* (2022)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBoKZAC9iiI>

In this TedTalk, Mary Francis O'Connor explains what happens in our brain while we grieve.



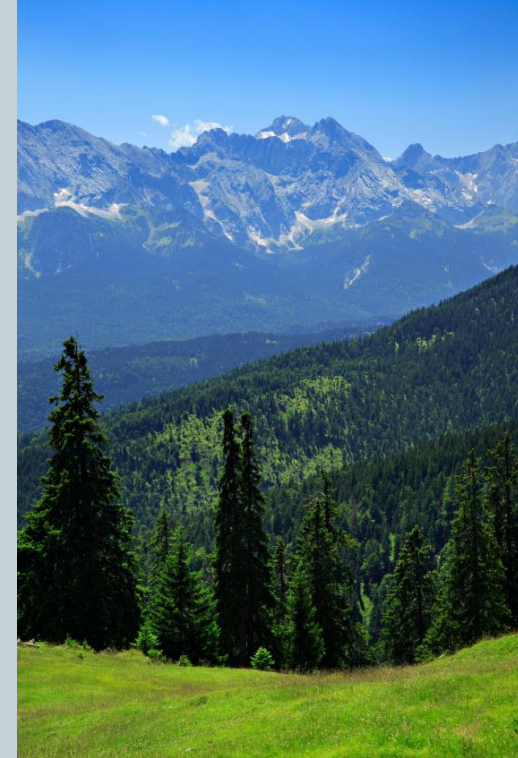
What does this loss mean for this individual at this particular time in their life?

Is it temporary, permanent or ongoing?

# Moving through Grief



- Shock/Numbness –  
Initial Response to the  
Loss Event
- Time of Disorganization –  
Acute Grief
- Process of Reorganization –  
Integrated Grief



# Growing Around Grief (whatsyourgrief.org)



<https://whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief/>



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

# THE GRIEF BOX & BALL: Lauren Herschel



- <https://psychcentral.com/blog/coping-with-grief-ball-and-box-analogy>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2kkQ-k47W8>
- Analogy that grief is like a box, with a ball in it, and a pain button on the side. In the early stages, the ball is huge, and frequently hits the pain button. Over time, the ball starts to get smaller. It doesn't disappear completely, but generally easier to get through the day.

# Four Tasks of Mourning

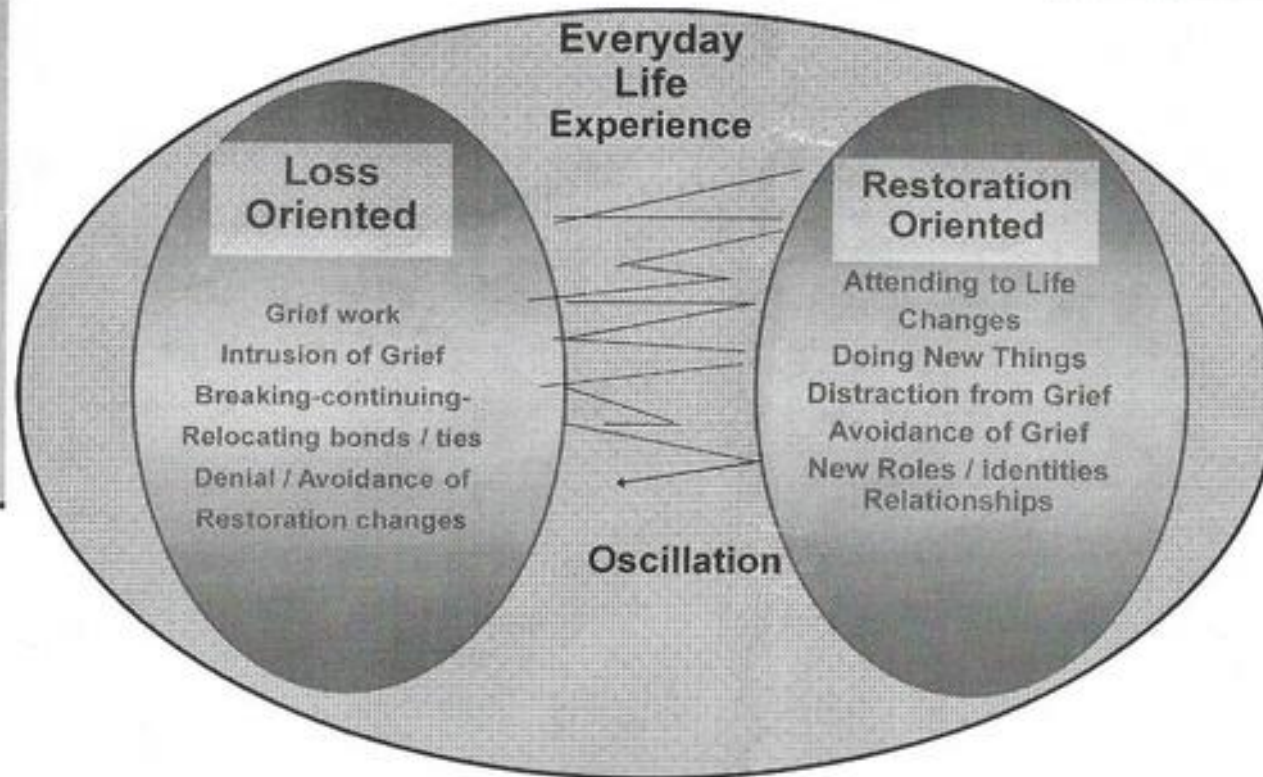
William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (5th edition, 2018)



- 1. to accept the reality of the loss
- 2. to process the pain of grief
- 3. to adjust to a world without the deceased
- 4. to find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's journey through life

# The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

Stroebe & Schut (Death Studies, 1999)





# Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief

(Klass, Silverman, Nickman, 1996)



- **Implications:**

- Bereaved people may not want the counselling process to work
- Fear letting go of the pain means letting go of their family member
- Focus on changing connections, not severing connections



# Use of Metaphor

Dr. Janice Nadeau, PhD





Grief only becomes a tolerable and creative experience when love enables it to be shared with someone who really understands

Simon  
Stephens



# Megan Devine: How To Help a Grieving Friend



Short video in which Megan Devine teaches us how to help someone who is grieving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2zLCCRT-nE>



**BEING HEARD, HELPS.**

**MEGAN DEVINE**



## Plague Poems @P... · 1h ...


That it is  
unbearable  
to witness  
is why you  
are obligated  
to bear witness.

# Grief Counseling

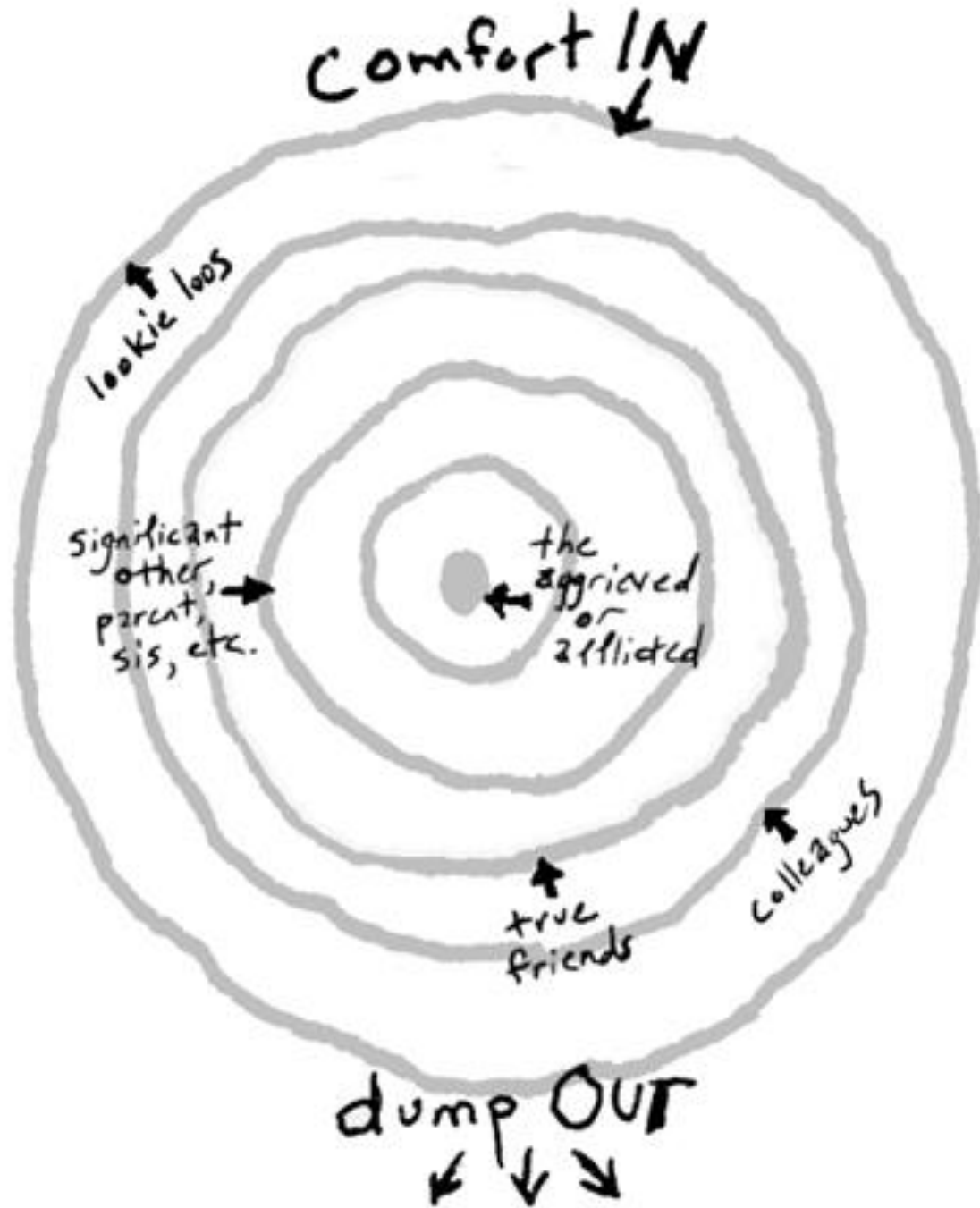
## Principles and Procedures

*Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy. Worden, 2002*

- Help the survivor actualize the loss
- Help the survivor to identify and experience feelings
- Assist living without the deceased
- Help find meaning in the loss
- Facilitate emotional relocation of the deceased

- 
- Provide time to grieve
  - Interpret “normal” behaviour
  - Allow for individual differences
  - Examine defenses and coping styles
  - Identify pathology and refer





## The Ring Theory of Kvetching by Susan Silk and Barry Goldman

Taken from: LA Times, April 7, 2013

<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/07/opinion/la-oe-0407-silk-ring-theory-20130407>

# Clinical Tools



- Telling of story
- Letter writing
- Re-write of obituary
- Empty Chair Technique
- Bill Hoy's questions
- Six word memoirs
- Self care
- Breathing
- 5-4-3-2-1

# Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkfln-ZtWeY>

Learn about how EMDR therapy works, what it is like, and how widely it is recognized. EMDR therapists discuss how EMDR therapy works and the feedback they receive from clients.

# EMDR Therapy and Grief



- Can address difficult images/sounds from illness/caregiver/death experience
- Can address negative cognitions one is carrying (such as: “I should have done something more”; “I’m not loveable”; I don’t deserve to live; I am powerless)
- Can address traumas from past that are impeding the grief response of current loss

# EMDR Techniques useful with grief



- Butterfly hug/Calm place
- EMDR 2.0 – taxing working memory
- Flash Technique
- Flash Forward
- Four Blink – Thomas Zimmerman

# Group Support



- What is it that makes groups work?
- Issues to attend to – ground rules
- Open-ended versus closed groups
- The role of the facilitator

# SHA Grief Support through Palliative Care



- Individual bereavement counselling for all palliative families
- Five Session Adult Grief Group
- Monthly Drop In Group
- Heart2Heart Family Grief Retreat – hopefully resume July 2024

# Frank Ostaseski, The Five Invitations



“YOU HAVE TO OPEN YOURSELF UP AND  
LET THE PAIN MOVE THROUGH YOU,”  
ELISABETH SAID.

“IT’S NOT YOURS TO HOLD.”



Erin Beckwell, MSW



**COMPASSION  
SATISFACTION AS THE  
ANTIDOTE TO COMPASSION  
FATIGUE**



# Joan Halifax - Practices when caring for Others



- May I offer my care and presence unconditionally, knowing it may be met by indifference, anger, sorrow or anguish.
- May I offer love, knowing that I cannot control the course of life, suffering or death.
- May I find the inner resources to truly be able to give



- May I be peaceful and let go of expectations
- May I accept things as they are.
- May I see my limits compassionately just as I view the suffering of others.

# **A Grateful Day with Brother David Steindl-Rast - Gratefulness.org**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSt7k\\_q\\_qRU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSt7k_q_qRU)



“When spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I was just witnessing the first flake melting.”

*The Kite Runner*, p. 391  
Khaled Hosseini

# Resources



- [www.virtualhospice.ca](http://www.virtualhospice.ca)
- [www.livingmyculture.ca](http://www.livingmyculture.ca)
- [www.mygrief.ca](http://www.mygrief.ca)
- [www.kidsgrief.ca](http://www.kidsgrief.ca)
- [www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)
- <https://speakinggrief.org/>
- <https://refugeingrief.com/>
- <https://prolongedgrief.columbia.edu/>
- <https://grateful.org/>

# Podcast Suggestions



- <https://refugeingrief.com/meganspodcasts/>
- <https://www.cnn.com/audio/podcasts/all-there-is-with-anderson-cooper>
- <https://whatsyourgrief.com/grief-podcast/>

# Articles of Interest



- <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/mar/05/mary-frances-oconnor-the-grieving-brain-grief-psychology>
- <https://www.themarginalian.org/2017/10/09/the-five-invitations-frank-ostaseski/>
- <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/loss-and-suffering-the-role-of-social-work/>
- <https://heatherplett.com/2015/03/hold-space/>



# Canadian Grief Alliance



- Despite the fact that everyone experiences loss, we live in a society where difficult emotions are rarely acknowledged, and many of us do not know how to respond when someone around us is suffering. The Canadian Grief Alliance is launching an effort to change that. Please take 5-10 minutes to share your thoughts on grief in this brief survey. By sharing your experiences – what helped, and what didn't – you will inform future work by the CGA to help grieving Canadians receive the support they need, and equip those around them with the knowledge and tools to help. Your responses are anonymous and confidential. The survey closes December 14, 2023.
- <https://questionnaire.simplesurvey.com/f/s.aspx?s=C5829F1A-0D6A-4E88-9419-1AFA2336B785>