

Spiritual Care Community of Practice Series 2

Spirituality of grief and bereavement



Facilitator: Diana Vincze, Pallium Canada

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

Date: February 18, 2025

Territorial Honouring

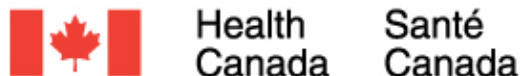


The Palliative Care ECHO Project

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 the CFPC and Royal College.



Learn more about the course and topics covered by visiting

www.pallium.ca/course/leap-core

Overview of Sessions

Session #	Session Title	Date/ Time
Session 1	How psychotherapy modalities can facilitate spiritual care in the palliative care context	August 20, 2024 from 1-2pm ET
Session 2	Cultural sensitivity: how to approach the conversation around spirituality	October 22, 2024 from 1-2pm ET
Session 3	Spiritual nature of living our losses part 1	November 26, 2024 from 1-2pm ET
Session 4	Spiritual nature of living our losses part 2	January 21, 2025 from 1-2pm ET
Session 5	Spirituality of Grief and Bereavement	February 18, 2025 from 1-2pm ET
Session 6	MAID Bereavement	April 8, 2025 from 1-2pm ET

Welcome and Reminders

- Please introduce yourself in the chat!
- Your microphones are muted. There will be time during this session when you can unmute yourself for questions and discussion.
- You are welcome to use the Q&A function to ask questions , they will be addressed towards the end of the session.
- Remember not to disclose any Personal Health Information (PHI) during the session.
- This session is being recorded and will be emailed to registrants within the next week.

Disclosure

Relationship with Financial Sponsors:

Pallium Canada

- Not-for-profit
- Funded by Health Canada

Disclosure

This program has received financial support from:

- Health Canada in the form of a contribution program
- Generates funds to support operations and R&D from Pallium Pocketbook sales and course registration Fees

Facilitator/ Presenter/Panelists:

Diana Vincze: Palliative Care ECHO Project Manager, Pallium Canada.

Matthew Fillier: nothing to disclose

Sheila Atkinson, RP, MDiv: nothing to disclose

Oceanna Hall: nothing to disclose

Christine Enfield: nothing to disclose

Peter Barnes, D.Min, CCC, SEP: nothing to disclose

Disclosure

Mitigating Potential Biases:

- The scientific planning committee had complete independent control over the development of course content

Introductions

Facilitator:

Diana Vincze

Palliative Care ECHO Project Manager, Pallium Canada

Presenter:

Matthew Fillier, B.A., M.Div

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

Panelists:

Peter Barnes, D.Min, CCC, SEP

Psychospiritual Therapist
Spiritual Pathways, Private Practice. CASC/ACSS
(certified) CCPA (certified)

Oceanna Hall, M.Div., M.Ed., RCH

Spiritual Health Practitioner, Certified CASC Clinical Specialist
End of Life, Palliative, MAiD and Bereavement
Spiritual Health Practitioner, Island Health Authority, Saanich
Peninsula Hospital Vancouver Island, BC

Sheila Atkinson, RP, M.Div.

Certified Spiritual Care Practitioner (CASC),
Registered Psychotherapist (CRPO),
Grief Support Coordinator, Pathways Grief
Support Program, Paediatric Advanced Care Team
(PACT), SickKids, Toronto, ON

Christine Enfield, M.Div.

Spiritual Health Practitioner, Tertiary Palliative Care
Unit, Covenant Health, Edmonton, Certified Spiritual
Care Practitioner (CASC/ACSS)

Spirituality of Grief and Bereavement





Spirituality and Grief

Setting Context for Loss and Grief

Unpacking the Dominance of Stage Theory

Grief and Trauma

Grief as a Non-Pathological Embodied Response

Spirituality, Meaning and Identity





Let's share a moment of silence

If you like, feel free
to name a loss,
whatever and whomever
it might be in the chat

**Grief is not a
problem to be solved;
it's an experience
to be carried.**

-MEGAN DEVINE

 REFUGE
IN GRIEF



Key takeaways

3, 874 Canadians 2023

50% didn't feel adequately supported in their grief.

53% felt their grief wasn't adequately recognized.



People want a dialogue on grief.

Non-death loss and grief is significant but less supported and understood.

There is a disconnect between what people need and how others respond.

People's expectations of support are often not met.

People want more grief support. One size does not fit all.

The international toll of COVID-19 deaths in September 2022, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, was nearly 6.5 million. With **each loss affecting about nine others***, (the reverberating effect is known as “bereavement multipliers”), we can expect almost **60 million people** to have experienced **death-related grief as a result of the virus.**

*Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States | PNAS



326, 571 deaths in Canada in 2023

2,939,139 minimum griever*

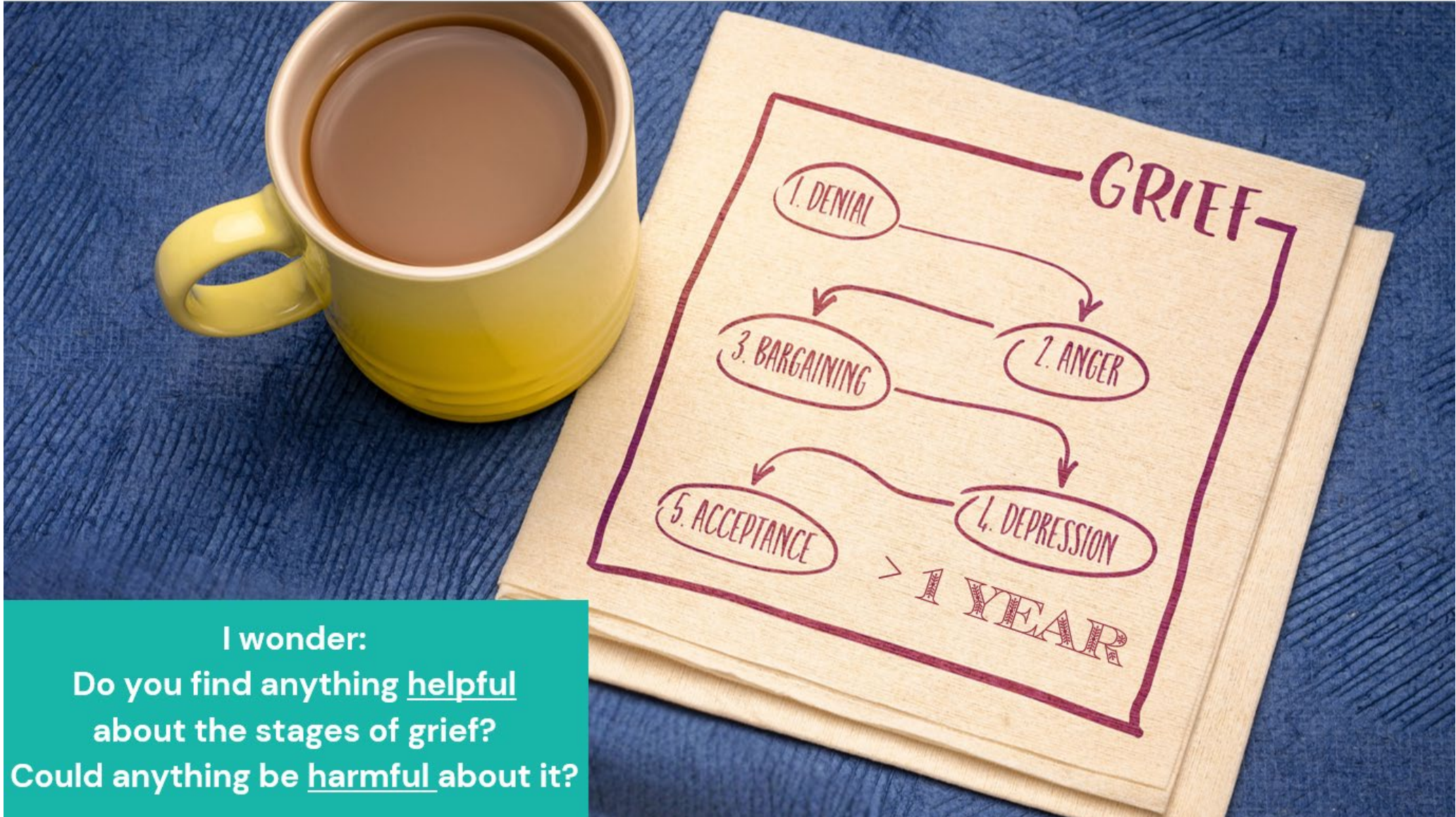
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241204/dq241204a-eng.htm>

Notably, a number of frequently accessed sources of support were reported to be less helpful than people hoped including healthcare systems, employer resources, and helplines.



What comes to mind
when you hear the word:

Grief?



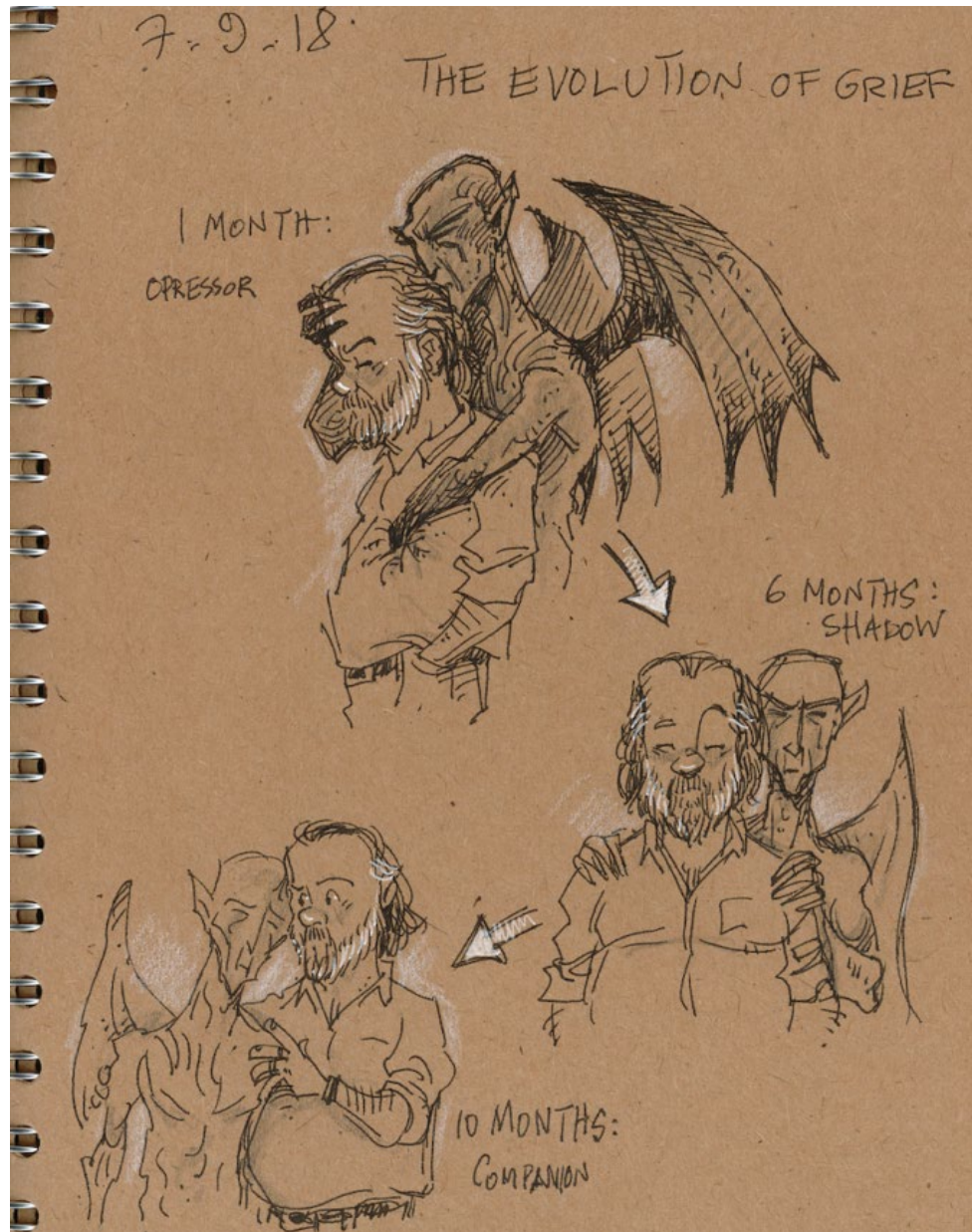
I wonder:
Do you find anything helpful
about the stages of grief?
Could anything be harmful about it?

Nova Scotia is Going Through a Lot of ~~Stages~~ of Grief and Loss



- April 18th–19th 2020 worst mass shooting in Canadian history
- Covid Pandemic March 2020 – May 5th 2023
- Snowbirds Crash (Jennifer Casey) May 17th 2020
- HMCS Fredericton Helicopter Crash (April 29 2020)
- Black Lives Matter (2020)
- Residential Schools Unmarked Graves (2021)
- NS Wildfires 2023
- NS Floods July 22nd 2023, and July 12th 2024
- The Desmond Inquiry (Final Report 2024)
- Since October 2025, 6 women were killed from intimate partner violence
- The losses and griefs each of us carry





Time is not a measure of grief.
Meaning is.

Grief is not linear or static.
Grief is dynamic and fluid.

Grief is a universal human phenomenon
– like breathing.

Just as no two people share the same
fingerprint, so it is with grief.

Your grief is the imprint left by
everything that makes up *your* loss.

Gary Andrews
UK-based artist who has worked
for Disney and on Fireman Sam

[GaryScribbler Finds Joy - Good Grief!](#)

The 5 Stages Guarantee?

“...Most disturbingly, the expectation that bereaved persons will, even should, go through stages of grieving can be harmful to those who do not.

Following such lines of reasoning, we argue that stage theory should be discarded by all concerned (including bereaved persons themselves); at best, it should be relegated to the realms of history. There are alternative models that better represent grieving processes.”

Article

Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons Are Misguided Through the Stages of Grief

Margaret Stroebe^{1,2}, Henk Schut¹, and Kathrin Boerner³

OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying
2017, Vol. 74(4) 455–464
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DOI: 10.1177/0030222817691878
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SAGE

Grief & Trauma

- Increased Mental Health Issues
- Social Fragmentation
- Economic Decline
- Escalation of Violence or Crime
- Intergenerational Trauma
- Reduced Civic Engagement
- Chronic Grief (lacking meaning and hope)

“...disaster survivors and the bereaved reported elevated levels of anxiety and depression symptoms **26 years after the event**. They also reported a markedly reduced level of social support. Traumas and post-traumatic responses may thus cause lasting harm to interpersonal relationships.”



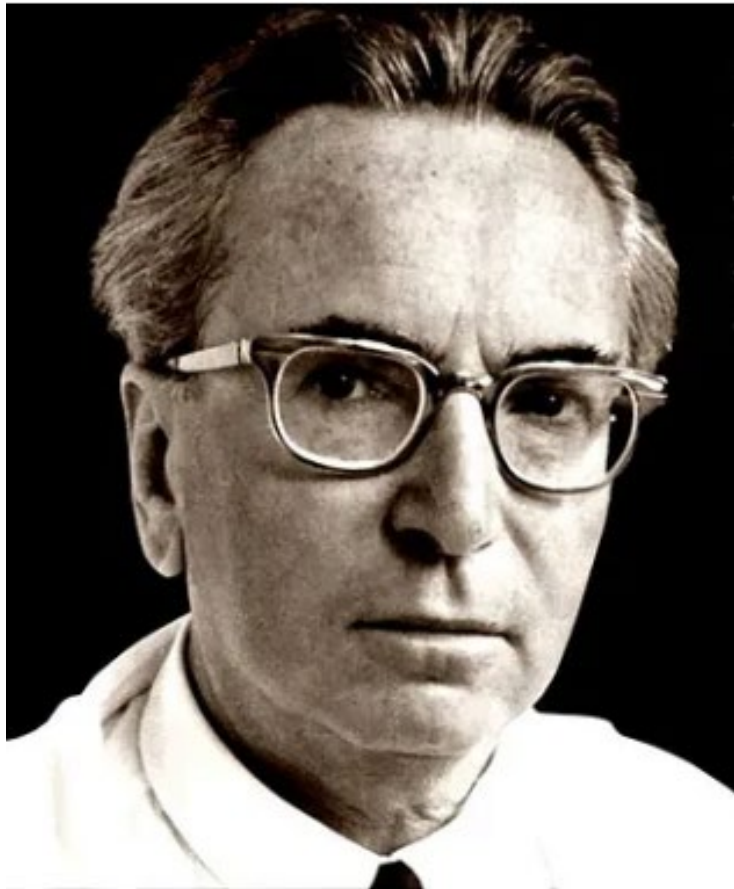
Grief and Trauma as Pathology:
What's Wrong with You?

Grief and Trauma Informed:
What's Happening to You?

The norm of solidarity: Experiencing negative aspects of community life after a school shooting tragedy *Journal of Social Work* 12(3) 300–319

Preparing For After:
How to help victims of mass violence © 2014 Voices of September 11th

Long-term mental health and social support in victims of disaster: comparison with a general population sample - PMC (nih.gov)



Grief and Trauma Informed:

An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behaviour.

The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in (their) own life.

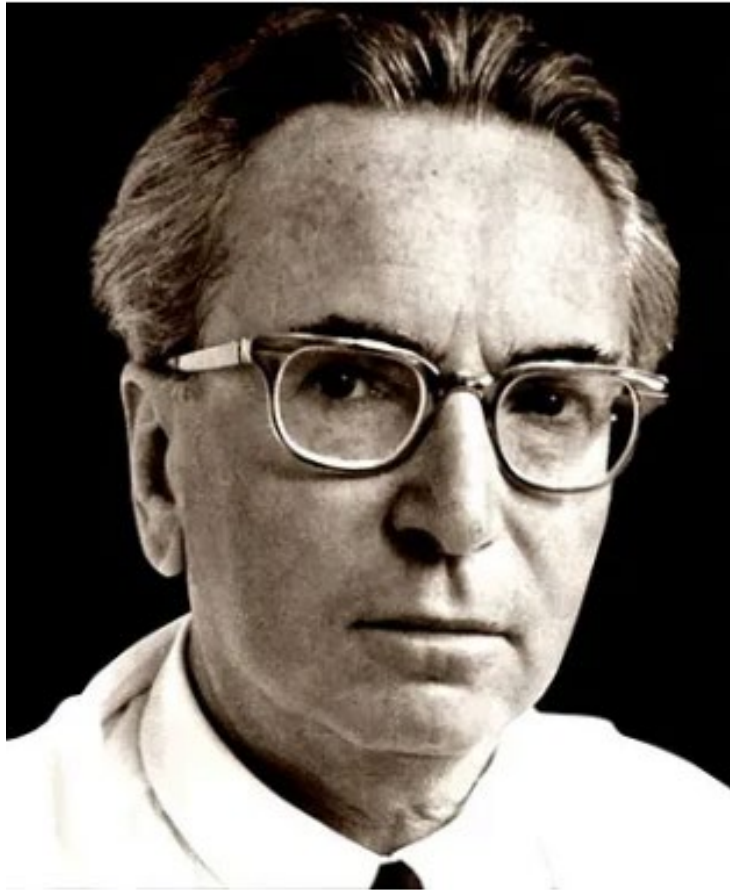
- Man's Search for Meaning (1946) Viktor E. Frankl



Loss

- Income
- Safety
- Security
- Home
- Culture
- Identity
- Dreams
- Relationships
- Community
- Rights
- Ability
- Faith
- Future





If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering.

Suffering is an ineradicable part of life like fate and death.

Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.

- Man's Search for Meaning (1946) Viktor E. Frankl

Wherever there are people, there will be **grief**
because **loss** is a **constant** of the human condition.

Life

Birth



Death

Loss

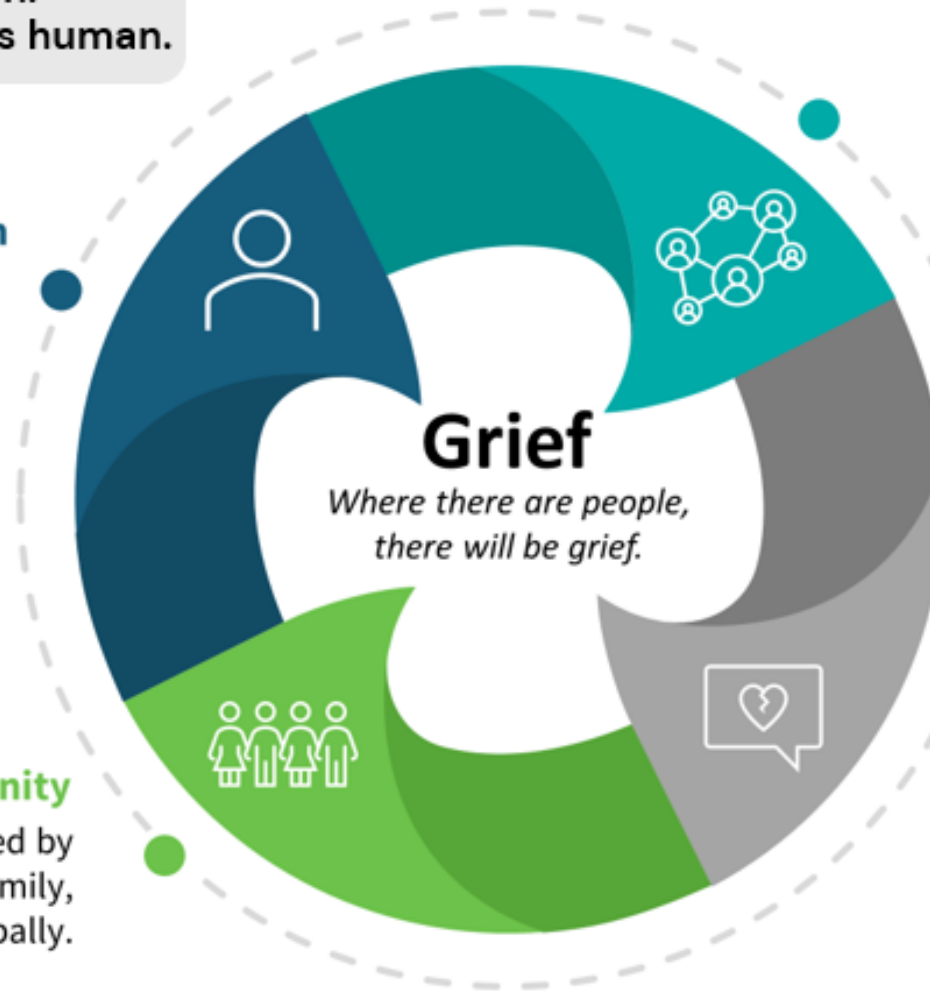
***Grief is a normal reaction to a complex situation. Grief is not pathological. It's human.**

One Person

Loss is constantly happening to each person. How they respond to their grief is unique to them.

Community

Loss and grief are experienced by groups of people, whether a family, town, city, province, country or globally.



Systems

Impacts the network of relationships that exist between individuals, groups, and institutions.

Culture & Society

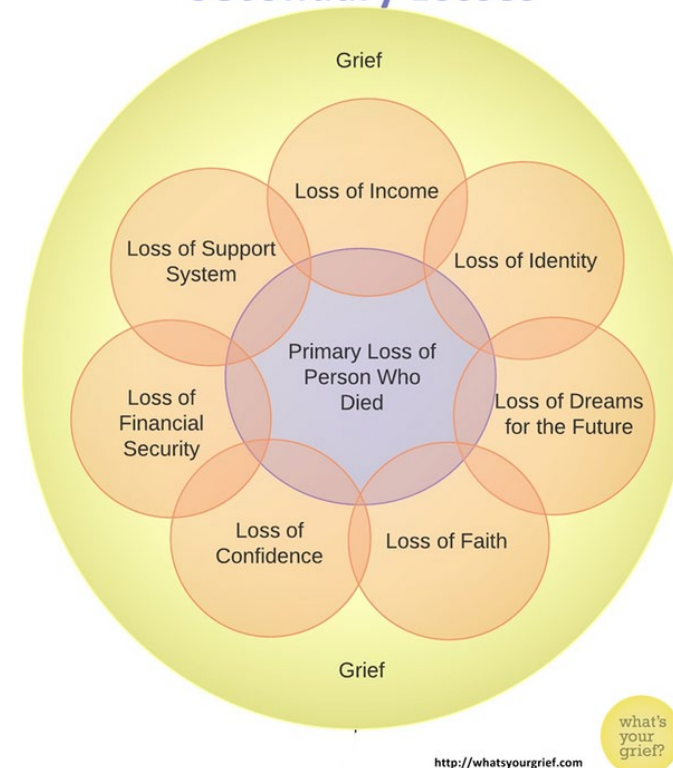
Your cultural and societal traditions, rituals, and beliefs about death, loss, and grief.

“Grief is present everywhere always.”

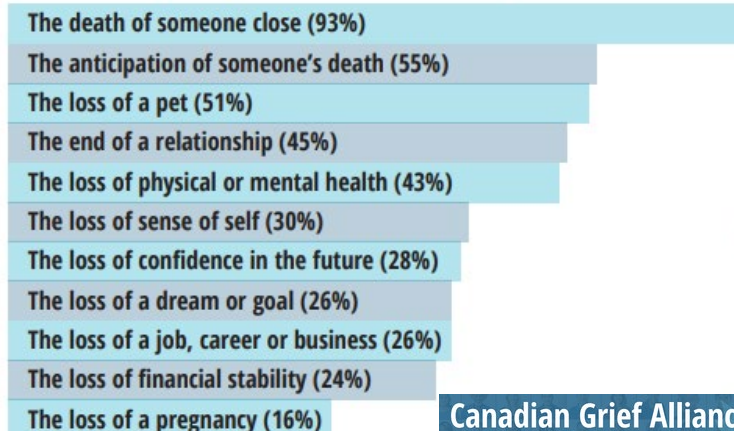
*Loss: The severing of someone or something to whom we have held great attachment (survive/thrive)

- Loss is always valid by the person experiencing it.
- Death is a kind of loss: “I lost my mom” not lost/found, but the attachment is severed.
- Attachment does not have to = love.
- You can grieve people and things you don’t “love” too.

Secondary Losses



Commonly reported causes of grief



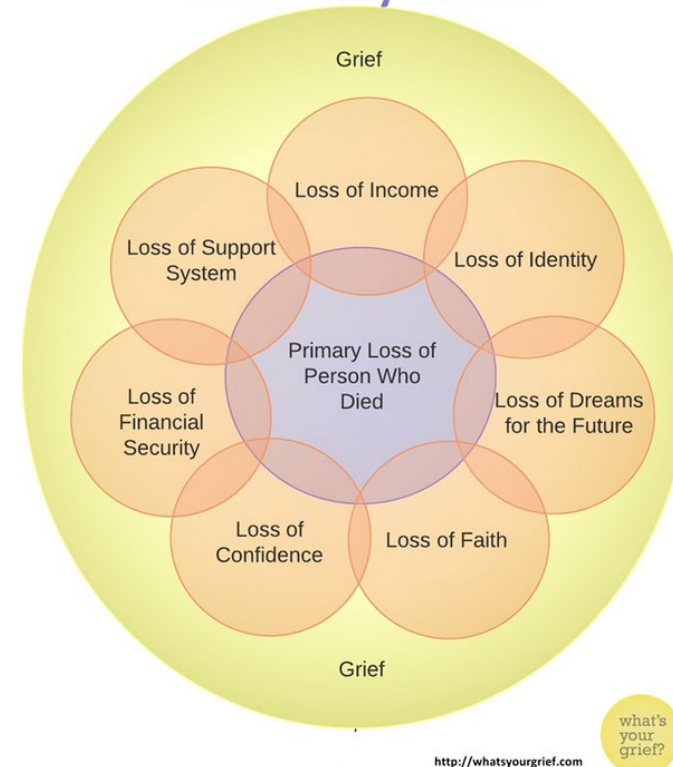
*Bar graph not to scale



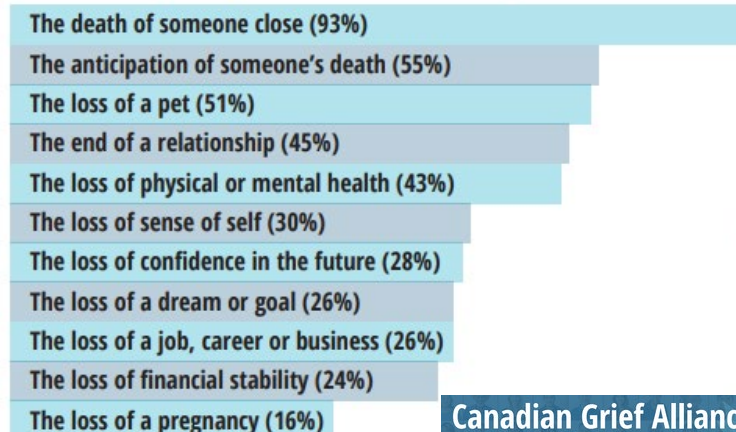
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Secondary Losses



Commonly reported causes of grief



*Bar graph not to scale



GRIEF

Rachelle Bensoussan: HUMAN(e): A Radical Reimagining of Grief, Loss and Learning to Live Without (2024)

Grief is an embodied and involuntary response to loss.

Can impact all aspects of life: physical, emotional, behavioural, social, financial, and spiritual.

Instead of a “right” way to grieve, consider “your” way to grieve.

Grief can be Hard on our Emotions

- Can include many emotions: sadness, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, anger, relief, hope, joy or numbness is common.
- If you can name it, grief can probably make you feel it.
- Be curious about emotional reactions – what is that emotion trying to tell you about a value or attachment that's important in this moment?
- Comparing grief reactions is common and can be unhelpful.



Grief and the Human Spirit

- Questioning your place in the world
- Once firmly held beliefs can destabilize and be reaffirmed (what is fair, just, good?)
- Enabling or disabling expression of emotions and thoughts
- Loss/discovery of meaning and purpose
- Sense of emptiness and isolation
- Spirituality is a both/and not an either/or
- Rituals, community gatherings, practices can support



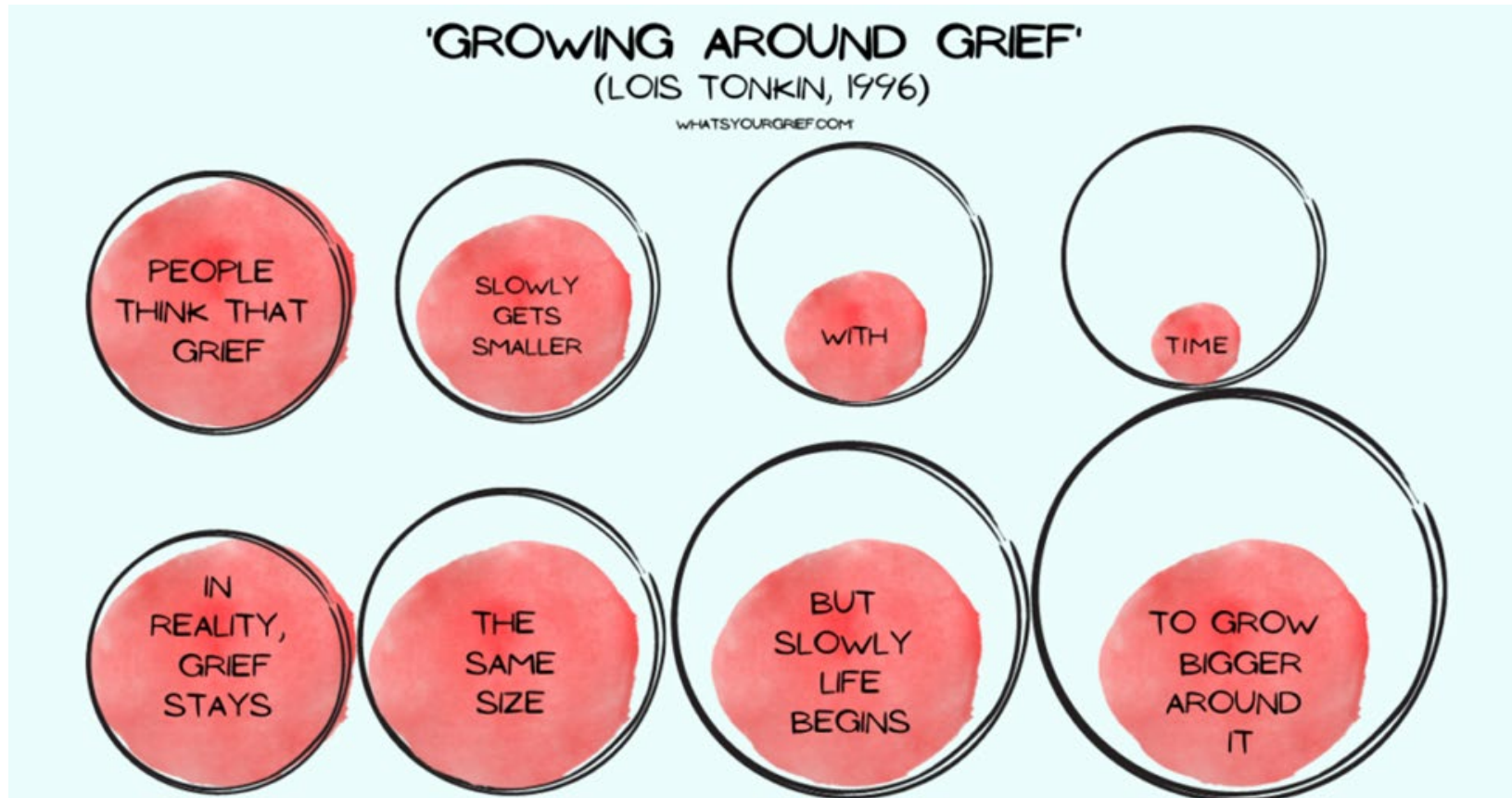


Spirituality Isn't A Get Out of Grief Free Card

- “We are wired for attachment in a world of impermanence.”
- Religious coping can be positive but it does not spare people the rigours of grief.
- People of faith seem to enjoy greater post traumatic growth.
- Can extend so far as what we might consider secular spiritualities too.
- Spiritual struggles in Palliative Care and bereavement tend to predict more complicated grief outcomes.

Robert E Neimeyer, Psychotherapist





- You can grieve the loss of anything or anyone significant to you.
- On the stage of life, grief is an actor that writes its own script.
- Loss is a forced identity transformation of which grief is a reaction and potentially, a way of reconstructing the meaning of one's life.



Spirituality & Compassion

- **Spirituality** is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning, and purpose to our lives.*
- **Compassion** is the ability and willingness to empathize without judgement and face pain.**

*The Gifts of Imperfection, Brené Brown (2010)

** I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't) Brené Brown (2012)

Push Past Platitudes

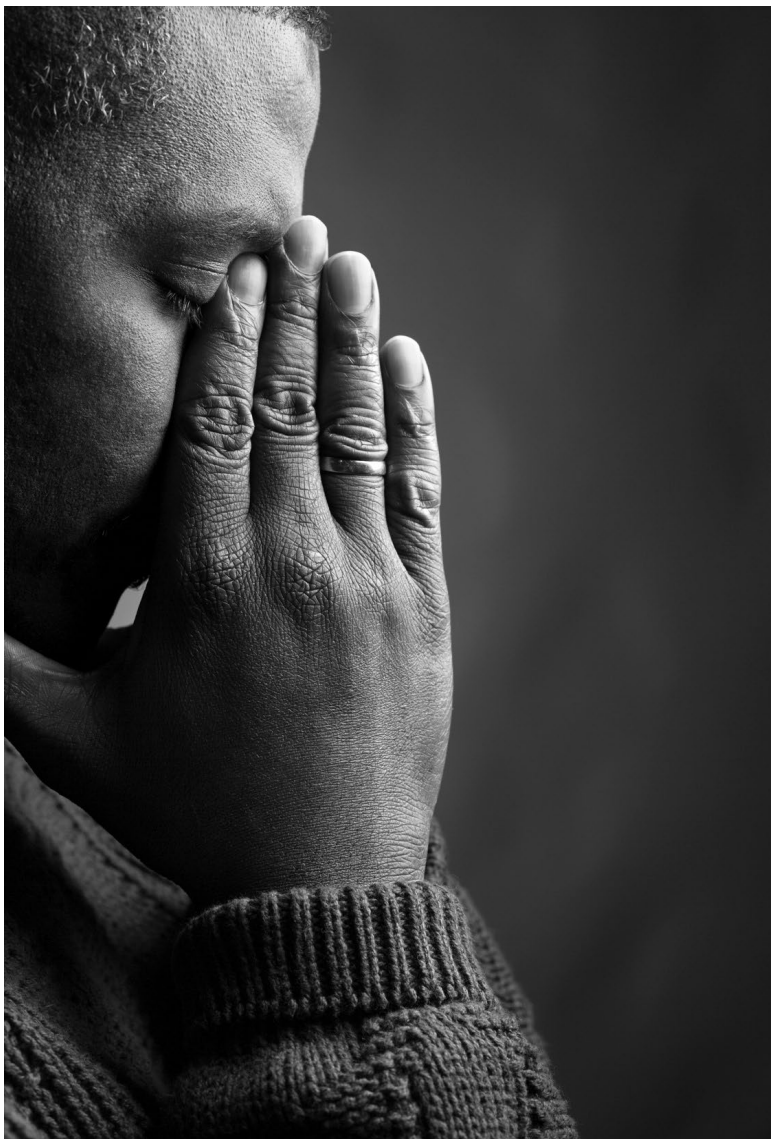
Let's Stop Forcing the Fixation on Fixing, Saving, and Rescuing People

- 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

Replacement = Displacement of Emotion (*and meaning!)

(Bianca Newman Asst. Director of Bereavement, Sue Ryder UK)





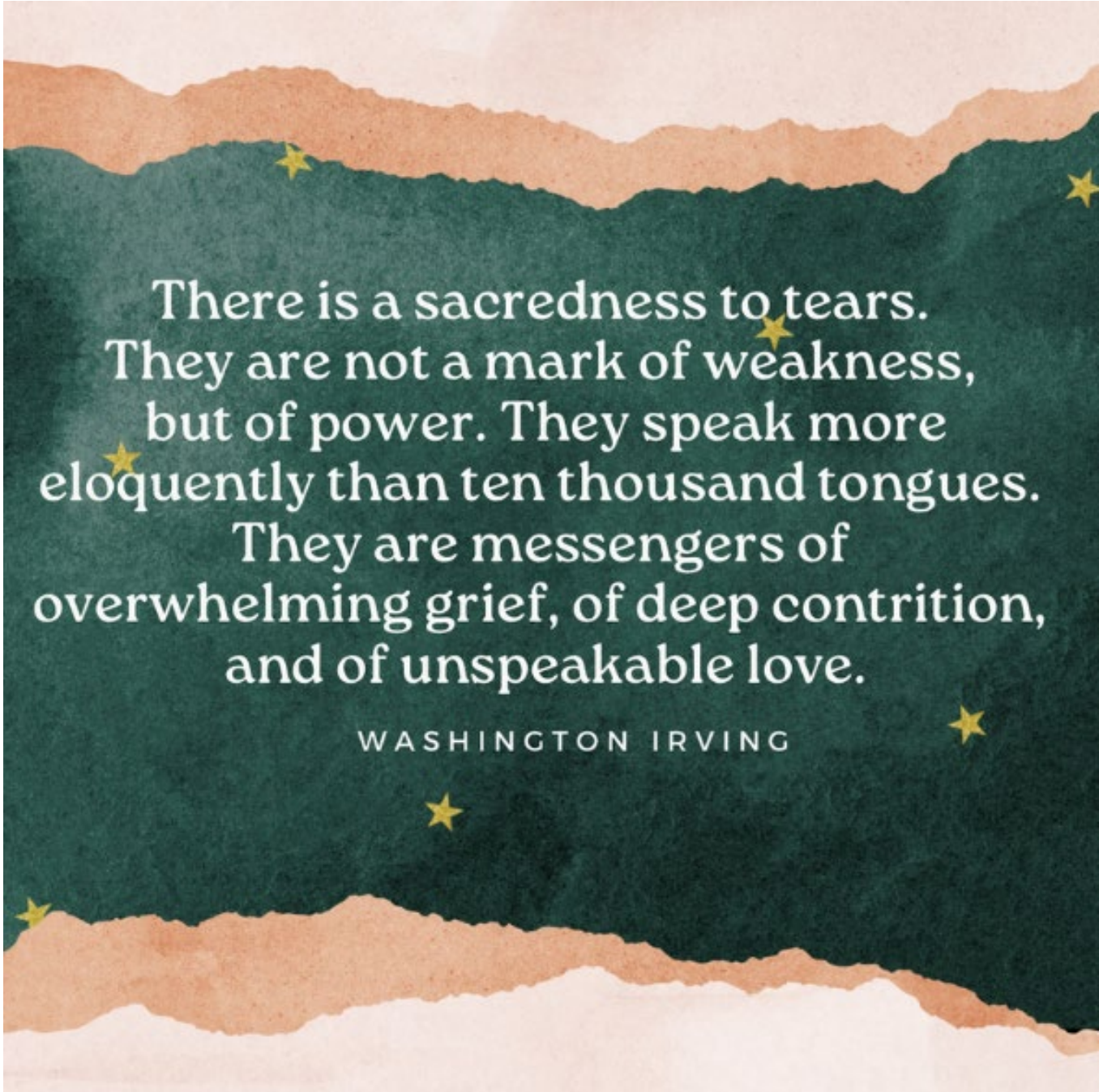
Leaving Grief to the Professionals

One of the most common responses griever hear from someone they're confiding in is:

"You should really talk to someone (else)."

Loss is constant
Grief is an experience
Compassion is a verb

"This is normal.
I am here too.
I am listening."



There is a sacredness to tears.
They are not a mark of weakness,
but of power. They speak more
eloquently than ten thousand tongues.
They are messengers of
overwhelming grief, of deep contrition,
and of unspeakable love.

WASHINGTON IRVING

Questions/Discussion



Session Wrap Up

- Please fill out our feedback survey, a link has been added into the chat.
- A recording of this session will be emailed to registrants within the next week.
- Join us at our next session scheduled for April 8, 2025 from 1 to 2pm ET on the topic of the **MAID bereavement**
- Thank you for your participation!

Thank You



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