

Supporting Individuals Experiencing Grief & Loss

Getting comfortable with sitting in the suck



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Territorial Acknowledgement

- *The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta Region III.*

Watching My Friend Pretend That Her Heart Is Not Breaking

By Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

On Earth, just a teaspoon of neutron star
would weigh six billion tons. Six billion tons.
The equivalent weight of how much railway
it would take to get a third of the way to the sun.
It's the collective weight of every animal
on earth. Times three.
Six billion tons sounds impossible
until I consider how it is to swallow grief—
just a teaspoon and one might as well have consumed
a neutron star. How dense it is,
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.
How difficult it is to move then.
How impossible to believe that anything
could lift that weight.
There are many reasons to treat each other
with great tenderness. One is
the sheer miracle that we are here together
on a planet surrounded by dying stars.
One is that we cannot see what
anyone else has swallowed.



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Key Concepts: Nothing to fix. Lots to support.

- What is grief?
- What is my role as a fellow human?
- What are responses that can help/harm in grief?
- What resources are available in my community?
- What is my institutional responsibility?



When someone is grieving, there is nothing to fix, but there is lots to support. Grief work is about learning to sit in the suck alongside someone.



Death Loss in University

- “Across studies we see that **35 to 45%** of college students are **within two years** of the death of a family member or a friend,”
- “One recent study indicated that just over **30%** of college students may experience a death each year.” (ACO 2021)



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During the Pandemic





Losses and COVID-19

- Economic security
- Holistic Health
- Food security
- Community
- Ceremony/Celebrations/
Rituals
- Stability/safety
- Sense of personal
freedom
- Future dreams
- Death
- Academic stability



Grief is Not

- Something to fix (you can't)
- A predictable, staged process that you complete
- Something you can fail at
- Something you're avoiding (it's already happening)
- Something that happens on a predictable/limited timeline
- Only expressed one way (e.g. crying)



Grief IS

- An expression of love/our values
- The continuation of a relationship that has changed
- Culturally influenced
- Highly individual
- Impactful on our daily living
- Healthy and normal
- A really hard whole-body experience
- Worthy of support

What to Expect During Grieving

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Crying spells
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Pain
- Sadness
- Trouble sleeping

(Mayo Clinic 2020)

Understanding Types of Grief

- Ambiguous Grief
- Latent (Hidden) Grief
- Anticipatory Grief
- Disenfranchised Grief

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“Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and their loss and grief will provide opportunities to develop tailored strategies.” (Zhai & Du, 2020).

Perceptions of Grieving

- Ranking of losses
- Timelines of grief



Grief is not linear

- Actually five stages of dying
- EKR backed away from the work herself
- “It has been a long nine years since my stroke, and I am anxious to die—graduate as I call it. I now know that the purpose of my life is more than these stages.... It is not just knowing the stages. It is not just about the life lost but the life lived.... I am so much more than five stages. And so are you. (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).





Loss of Assumptive World Model



What do you already know?

Think of a time you experienced a sense of loss.

What Helped?



Things that Don't Help

- Brightsiding
- Assuming religious concepts
- Minimizing
- Not Here/ Not Now
- Avoidance
- Be afraid of their suffering
- Centering our curiosity

Grounding Activity

Breathe in



Using your Power

- Critiquing fairness/equality
- Supporting people through mindful policy & context

**BE KIND.
LET'S
LOOK OUT
FOR ONE
ANOTHER.**

COMMUNITY IS KINDNESS.

We Can

- Validate & Acknowledge
- Avoid comparing
- Provide soft referrals
- Move what we can



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Confidentiality

Goal:

Share their story with the least number of people

Only the appropriate supports and support people to have access to the personal information



Protocol for Campus Community Loss

- There is a UCalgary process for supporting the campus when there is a loss.
- If you are the first person to know about a loss on campus, there are people and processes to support you.

Contact

- If a student has passed, VP Student Experience is the contact liaison
- If a staff member has passed, their supervisor/director is the contact liaison.

Resources available/referral

Campus Mental Health Strategy Grief page

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/get-support/grief-and-loss>

Student Wellness Service

- Student Support

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services>

Staff Wellness

- Staff Supports

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/wellness>

Websites

Refugeingrief.co (here after podcast)

Theinnerparty.org

Mygrief.ca

Wellnesstogether.ca

Speakinggrief.org

Grief Capacity Building Workshops

- Normalize grief
- Increase awareness of supports
- Enhance staff/student understanding of how to help one another
- Online delivery increases comfort for grieving humans

Questions?