

# A TOOLKIT FOR GRIEF

support for you and your community

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BY:



# INTRODUCTION

**“We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air. Individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this. But all together, this is new. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level”.**

-David Kessler

Over the past year, we have all experienced some type of loss. Grief is a natural human experience that we all may feel. This toolkit is to help us think, act, and change through our grief stories; making them meaningful to us and our communities.

## What do we mean by community?

Community can be found in the places we live, work, and play. It is found in the contact we have with others through common interests, beliefs, or passions!



Grief Tree organized by Mahogany resident Jordan Blasetti. Picture taken by Katharine Blasetti.

**What communities do you belong to?**



**activities**



**information**



**to think about...**

**LOOK OUT FOR THESE  
SYMBOLS TO FIND...**



# UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

Grief is a **hard and complex** process of coping with loss, which is felt in many different ways.

spiritual

social

thinking

emotional

physical

## TYPES OF GRIEF

### **Ambiguous:**

loss that happens without closure or clear understanding, often resulting in unresolved feelings.

### **Anticipatory:**

refers to grief experienced before a loss occurs.

### **Bereavement:**

when a person experiences sadness after losing a loved one.

### **Complicated:**

ongoing, strong feeling of loss that can make the process of healing more difficult.

### **Note:**

There are other kinds of grief not listed here.

### **Disenfranchised:**

grief that is not accepted or understood by others.



**Everyone has their own journey with grief. There is no "right" way.**

**"The door to mourning should be left unlocked for people to enter when they wish".**

(Joshua Miller, 2012)



# EXPERIENCING LOSS



## Have a mindful moment:

What have you lost in the past year?  
What has your community lost?

### Remember...

- > Loss can show itself in many different ways.
- > We can relive old losses as we move through any new loss.
- > The lack of physical loss, which can feel more typical and unclear, may cause difficulty in moving through grief and helping others in their process.



## Personal



## Collective



We can think of loss on both macro and micro levels. **Micro-losses** are experienced at a **personal** level and **macro-losses** are experienced by a **collective** group, such as the *communities* we belong to. Both are equally significant in our lives.

Loss can display in many different ways. At the personal level you could be mourning the loss of a loved one. You can feel the loss of physical health after an illness or injury. Financial loss can occur after losing your job and sense of financial security. Institutional, collective, loss occurs when our social connections are no longer there to support us...

As life continues to be hard in our ever-changing world, people are feeling more and more kinds of loss, which brings on more and more grief.



- The process of **emotional validation** is one way of supporting someone's journey through grief. ●

Self-validation occurs when we notice and accept our own thoughts, feelings, responses and behaviors. When we validate others, we see and recognize those aspects as part of another person's journey.

- Both are important as each journey is different and we need to normalize the grief experience, *whenever, and however* it shows up. ●

**"Grief is characterized much more by waves of feeling that lessen and reoccur, it's less like stages and more like different states of feeling."**

- Meghan O'Rourke

# THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY TO GRIEVE

Psychiatrist Ken Doka created the term “*disenfranchised grief*” to describe the type of grief that occurs when a loss is not approved of, openly accepted or felt by other people. It is important to welcome the different ways that we and our communities might feel different types of loss. This allows us to share and work through grief in a healthy, supportive way. When we don't notice different losses, we disenfranchise our grief or the grief of others. This can limit how we feel, process, and move through our feelings, thoughts, behaviours.

Psychiatrists Terry Martin and Ken Doka identified these two different grieving styles: **instrumental and intuitive. Most people are a mix of both styles.**



## INSTRUMENTAL (THINKING/DOING)



## INTUITIVE (FEELING)



Instrumental grievers focus more on thinking rather than feeling. They are likely to share their grief out loud, asking questions, by keeping busy and focusing on activities.

Intuitive grievers share their emotions and feelings with others. They can be very expressive and need to explore their feelings in order to progress through their pain and move towards healing.

### HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT:

- Provide projects of interest to keep busy and distracted.
  - Examples of this might be housework, staining a deck, watching multiple seasons of a show, training for an event like a marathon, or organizing random acts of kindness for neighbours.
- Recognize and accept that keeping busy is a good way of processing grief and loss.

### HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT:

- Listen without trying to fix anything.
- Validate any emotions or thoughts they may share.
  - Be understanding.
- Have somewhere in the community where people can express themselves, like a grief tree.
- Find a support group where they can connect with others going through a similar journey.

#### Citations:

Doka, K. J., & Martin, T. L. (2011). Grieving Styles: Gender and Grief. *Grief Matters*, 14(2), 42–45.

Instrumental vs intuitive grief. (2019, August 27). Retrieved April 08, 2021, from <https://www.bfotoronto.ca/thoughts-on-grief/instrumental-vs-intuitive-grief/>



# GRIEF IS NOT LINEAR



Margaret Stroebe & Henk Schut created the **Dual Process Model** to highlight the natural switching between two states of being during the grieving experience. This model shows the dynamic, back and forth movement between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented responses. It can help us to recognize and normalize the often messy and non-linear process of grief. Our grief may move between these states within seconds, minutes, days, weeks... we rarely remain in the same state long.

## THE GRIEF EXPERIENCE

### LOSS-ORIENTED

- thinking about the loss
- intense and often unexpected emotional expression (e.g. anger, crying)
- focusing on and exploring the impact of the loss of relationships and connection

### RESTORATION-ORIENTED

- managing life changes
- trying new things
- distracting from grief, sometimes to the point of denial/avoidance
- establishing new roles, identities, and relationships

Graphic adapted from Stroebe & Schut, 1999.

Citation:

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23(3), 197–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/074811899201046>



# EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF

Grieving can affect emotions, thoughts, and behaviours.

We might hear people mention models that outline phases and stages of grief. Although they can be helpful as a general framework, instead of stages, these can instead be considered **states of being** during our grieving journeys. These states are fluid, non-linear, and reoccurring, reminding us that there is no cure, fix, or one-size-fits all approach to grief!

Adapted from grief expert, David Kessler, below are a few examples of states of being, including what they may feel like, and what we might hear from our fellow community members experiencing them.

**DENIAL**

A common defense mechanism is to be stuck in disbelief and to deny something is happening. This decreases or numbs the intensity of a situation and gives more time to process the change.

"Everyone is over-reacting! We should keep living our lives!"

"Why can't I come in for my normal exercise class?! Why am I even a member here?"

Anger can hide the many emotions and pain we experience because of change. It can act as a 'masking effect', and present as resentment, bitterness, frustration, etc.

**ANGER**

Grief can make us feel vulnerable, helpless, and drive us to seek ways of regaining a sense of control over our situations.

**BARGAINING**

"What if we do this event as one last hurrah before we follow the new COVID guidelines?"

"I feel so disconnected from everything and everyone."

We can often experience feelings of fogginess, heaviness, and confusion. This might make us isolate from others and withdraw from our usual activities.

**DEPRESSION**

**ACCEPTANCE**

We can accept and understand what our loss means. This may not be the end of the process, but can be an important part of the journey as we continue to navigate grief.

"COVID-19 allowed our family to re-discover some wonderful areas in our neighbourhood!"

*hope*

**FINDING MEANING**

"These are important choices we need to make to stay safe."

Instead of looking for closure, we are able to transform grief into a more meaningful experience by recognizing things we have learned, or where we have experienced hope throughout it.

# EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF: REFLECTIONS



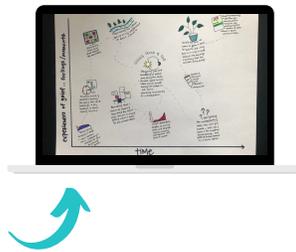
What have your experiences of COVID grief been?

In what ways have you seen grief show up in others?  
How has your connection to community been affected due to individual and collective grief?



## Mapping COVID-19 Grief

Over the past year, what experiences are a reflection of your grieving process? Try to identify moments and feelings you may remember. What might the collective grief journey of your community look like over this time? See an example [here](#).



Is there a public space in your community where members can express their COVID-19 grief and share ideas on how to support one another?



Are there opportunities in your community to practice this exercise together virtually?

## Cultivate a Growth Mindset

Recognizing the many states of grief we experience personally and collectively allows us to take care of ourselves and each other.

We also want to think about how grief impacts our lives and our community as we move forward to be stronger, together!

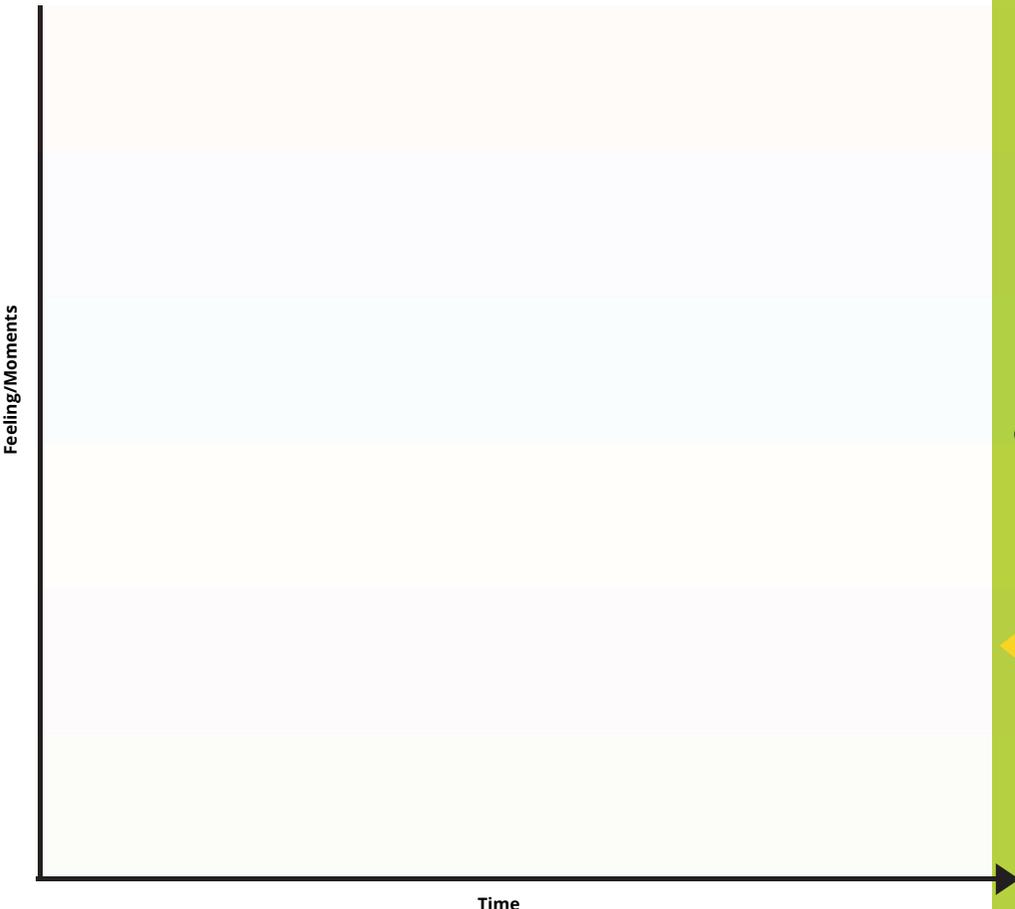
**How can we process and move through our collective grief - the loss of community life we may be feeling?**



What has helped you process your collective grief so far at these various points?



How can these actions support you and your community in moving forward and finding meaning in your experiences?



# MOVING THROUGH GRIEF:

## AS INDIVIDUALS



### Practice Self-Compassion

A common experience when feeling grief or anxiety is to move towards self-criticism or to express harsh thoughts towards ourselves. Remember, there is no timeline for grief and each person experiences it differently. Something that can help us extend gentleness to ourselves during the process and in our day to day lives is the practice of **self-compassion**.



One way to extend self-compassion and express grief is by writing a letter to ourselves.

Acknowledge the things lost and intentionally **name the emotions** felt.



I AM ENOUGH. I BELIEVE IN ME. I AM WORTHY OF LOVE.

**Write affirmations** as a reminder of your bravery, strength, courage, and other empowering traits you have. These can be re-written everyday or placed somewhere that you can see and return to them regularly.

Use the Covid-19 grief map or create a personal timeline to highlight significant events in the year. Include how you felt at these different moments and the impact they had on your life and identity.

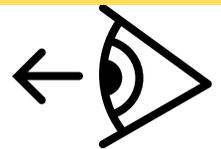
### Create a **Personal Support System Map**

Grab some paper and markers to create a map outlining the people and things that make you feel supported. Who do you feel comfortable reaching out to in times of sadness? It could be family members, friends, or even places that feel soothing to you. such as a spot you created in your home, or a place in nature that you like to return to.

### Connect to the Present

We can practice grounding ourselves when our emotions feel overwhelming, by returning to the present moment and send calming signals to our brain and nervous system through the activities below.

Name 5 things you can **see**



4 things you can **touch**

3 things you can **hear**



2 things you can **smell**

1 thing you can **taste**



*breathe*



Take a minute to sit or lay down, putting one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. Watch your stomach fill with air as you slowly inhale while counting to 5. Hold your breath for 5 seconds, gently exhale for 5 seconds, and hold once again for 5 seconds once you've finished exhaling your breath. Repeat as needed.

# MOVING THROUGH GRIEF:



## IN COMMUNITY

### create a community mural or memorial site



Invite community members to share a message or even just a few words to express community losses, experiences, and thoughts during the past year and as we move forward. Perhaps, you could pick a theme or question like "what does resilience mean to you?" Then, put in the windows of your houses or in a communal space such as a little library box or bench. This can create a place for emotional release and shared validation of one another.



### process loss together

Use a digital methods such as Jamboard to either create a map of support resources in the community, a timeline of your collective grief and growth, or simply host a community gathering where people can feel safe to share their feelings to whatever extent they are comfortable with.



### create a grief tree in your neighbourhood



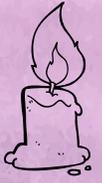
Provide community members ribbons and invite them to write something they are grieving. Everyone can then tie the ribbon to a tree branch, just as it is pictured in the introduction! (please designate someone to look after the tree so that ribbons are picked up and that it gets cleaned up at an established time to prevent unintentional littering)



### host a virtual skill share

As we transition to moving forward and finding meaning in all that happened over the past year, encourage a strength-based perspective. Create a space where people can share their unique skills, talents, and traits as well as learn what others have to offer! This is a great way to celebrate and appreciate successes while offering opportunities for mutual support.

### ritualize loss



Create a COVID-safe space for community members to commemorate their losses. Encourage them to express their losses in meaningful, creative ways. Examples of this could be a song, poem, picture, or artistic representation. Hold a ceremony in which these expressions are gathered and locked in a box or burned as a sign of letting them go. *Reminder:* all individuals will be at differing stages of their grieving journeys and some might not be ready to dispose of what they have created.

### random acts of kindness



Pick a day for everyone to engage in random acts of kindness together! This could be giving back to your community by dropping off groceries at the community fridge or simply writing affirmation cards and delivering them to folks in your neighbourhood.

# WHAT ARE YOU TAKING WITH YOU?



An important piece of moving through grief is **finding meaning**. Although, the pages of this toolkit are coming to an end, your journey with grief and growth, as individuals and communities is just beginning! Reflect on what meaning you have discovered and what actions you need to take to keep moving forward.



What is one thing you **learned** about grief?



What did you **feel** as you practiced expressing your grief using this toolkit?



## HANDS

What **meaningful action** will you take to express your grief and support your community?

# SHARE & CELEBRATE!



Although many opportunities to be with others were lost, we have collectively gained insight into how we can *connect and explore* the virtual space. Let's **share and celebrate** our actions in the spirit of learning and encouraging even more future accomplishments!

People may question their identity after navigating through grief and loss. In efforts to support one another, please be mindful of your words and actions as they could be contributing to experiences of disenfranchised grief. *Reminder*, this is the kind of grief that lacks acknowledgment and validation by social norms.



## INSPIRE ONE ANOTHER!

Maximize the many functions of social media. Whether it is an intentional picture or story, share it online with the people you care about! We know our team LOVES seeing what is happening in the community. You can also check out local stories to see how others are connecting over collective grief @CDLICALgary on Instagram or [at our blog!](#)

### Connect with us!

Share your stories with us as you put the toolkit into action: **@CDLICALgary** on Instagram and Twitter or send us an email!



*#connectinspireact*



Part of the excitement is **basking in appreciation and gratitude**. Shoutout and thank not only those around you, but also take the time to give yourself a pat on the back!

# RESOURCES & CONTACTS



## FURTHER SUPPORT

[Grief Support Program, Calgary Zone](#)  
[Grieving Together, Alberta Health Services](#)  
[My Grief](#)

## STAY IN THE LOOP!

Check out the [Community Grief Blog](#) for updated information on grief resources, community development activities, and stories from your fellow community members.

## GET IN TOUCH!

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