



# Understanding and Working with Grief

*Good...*  
*...Grief*

Michelle J. Yep Martin,  
Psy.D., M.S., M.A

# What exactly is grief?



An ongoing, inevitable process through which you learn to live with a loss

...but wait, *is that all?*

## Grief isn't just about death

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The Grief Recovery Method defines grief as both...

"The conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a family pattern of behavior"

*as well as*

"intangible grief."



## What Is Intangible grief?

These are things that happen in our lives that are unable to be touched or necessarily seen by others.

### Loss of Trust

From your boss, from your spouse, with your child or friends

From your boss, your spouse, or friends. This feeling can make you unhinged, like trying to get your “sea legs” back.

### Loss of Approval

### Loss of Safety

This can come from a whole host of things to feeling unsafe in your home, your office or your community.

Sexual assault, medical trauma, dementia

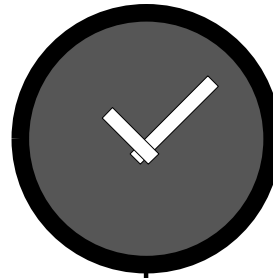
### Loss of Control of own Body

## **Common Myths about Grief**

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**It is a linear process  
consisting of 4-5 stages**



**There is a specific  
“time frame” for grief**

# Transgenerational Trauma and Grief

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This refers to situations where a grief event was powerful enough in a family that it was carried on to the next generation, and generations thereafter.

## In villages and reservations

Disenfranchised grief

## School shootings

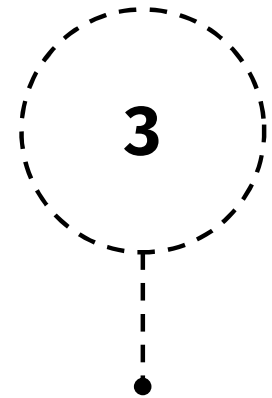
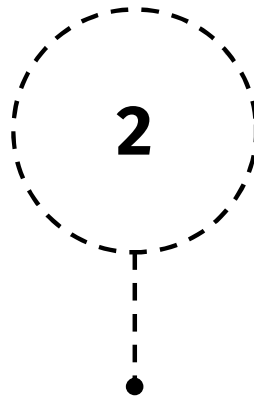
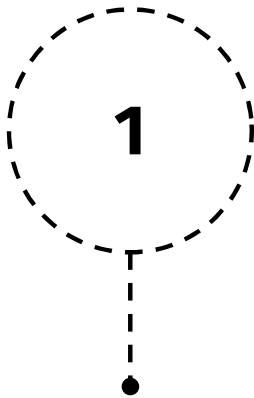
Loss of a feeling of safety at school, feeling of hopelessness that a change can or will be made. Loss of our youth.

## War and conflict

The loss of the family unit, loss of faith in governments, loss of life to an extreme degree, such as The Holocaust and Vietnam. A change in respect for our military members.

## Three basic phases of grief

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**Shock/disbelief/denial**

**Experience of loss**

**Process of “Resolution”**

**1**

## **Shock/disbelief/denial**

Characterized by:  
Feeling as if things  
are “unreal”  
Feeling numb

As “reality” hits,  
this phase tends  
to fade

**2**

## **Experience of loss**

- Emotional symptoms
- Physical symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Social symptoms

**3**

## **Process of “Resolution”**

- Symptoms decrease
- Functioning increases
- Better able to focus on & make plans for the future
- NOT an elimination of symptoms
- “Complicated grief”



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## **Emotional symptoms of grief**

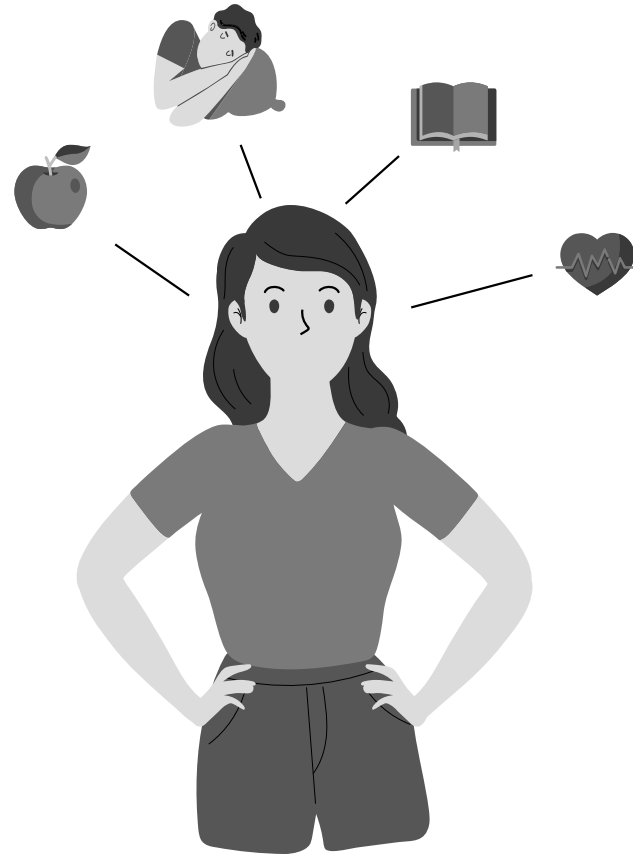
- Mood swings
- Emotions



## Physical symptoms

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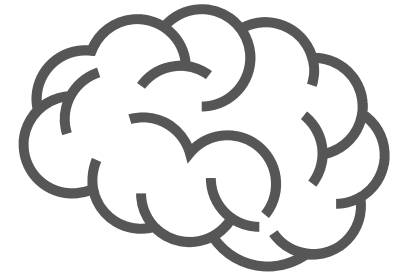
- Appetite changes
- Sleep changes
- Poor concentration
- Confusion
- Fatigue



## **Cognitive symptoms**

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- Preoccupation
  - With person who has died
  - With circumstances of the loss
- Identification with the deceased
- Existential questions
- Questioning faith



## **Social “symptoms”**

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- Isolation from others
- Taking care of others
- Throwing oneself into work
- All one can talk about is the loss

## **How one grieves depends upon**

- Individual coping skills
- Religious and cultural beliefs
- History of additional losses
- Support system
- Relationship with the deceased
- Unresolved feelings or “issues”

## **How one grieves depends upon (continued)**

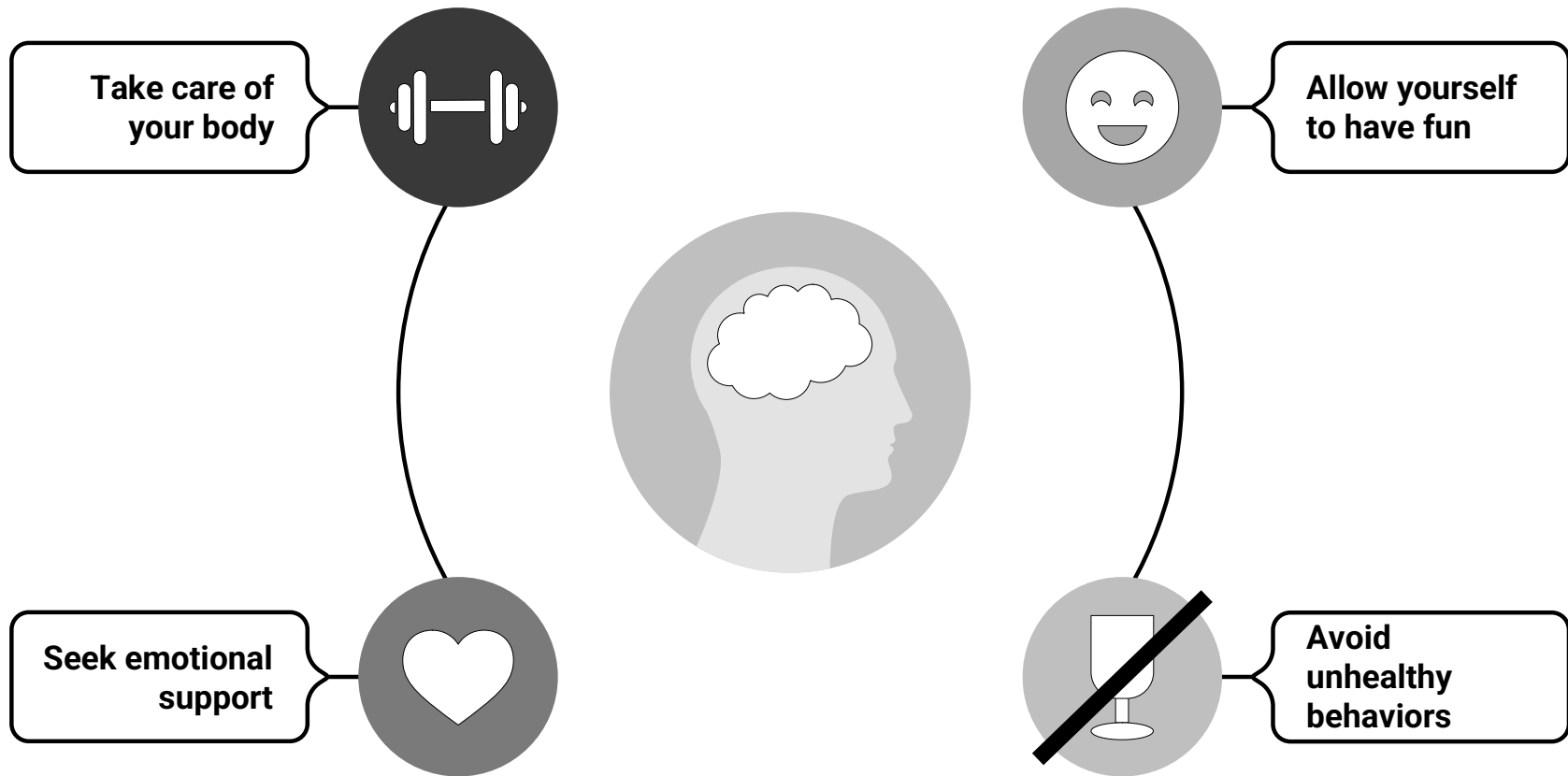
### **Circumstances of the death**

- Sudden illness
- Sudden accident
- Prolonged illness
- Social stigma
  - Death by suicide
- Situations others may not understand



# How to help yourself

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## **When to seek professional help**

- It is always okay to seek professional help
  - You do not need to be in crisis for therapy to be helpful
  - Compounded experiences of loss
  - Feeling suicidal or increasingly depressed

## **When to seek professional help (continued)**

- Some urgent signs of needing help:
  - Significant changes in sleep or appetite
  - Difficulty functioning at home or work
  - Unresolved issues with the deceased
  - Compounded experiences of loss
  - Feeling suicidal or increasingly depressed

## **How therapy can help**

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- **Adults**

- Someplace safe to talk
- Increased understanding of deeper layers

## **How therapy can help**

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- **Children**

- Therapist is a grown-up who isn't grieving too
- Trained to understand communication



## **Children and grief**

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- Different from adults
- Influenced by:
  - Age & stage of development
  - Personality
  - Relationship with deceased
  - Prior experiences with death
  - Ability to express feelings
  - Parents' ability to cope with child's upset

## **Understanding of death by age range**

- Infants and Toddlers
- 3-6: Death is like sleep; temporary
- 6-9: Death happens to “old people”
- 9+ : Death happens to everyone



## **Children's response to death**

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- Asking questions
- “Magical thinking”
- Fear of bad things happening
- Preoccupied with health
- Anger & acting out
- Play themes
  - Death
  - Abandonment

## **Tips for helping grieving children**

1. Be honest
2. Answer questions directly
3. Give age-appropriate answers
4. Use words like “die,” “death,” name of illness
5. Acknowledge & normalize feelings
6. Use books and stories to help children talk

## **Children and Funerals**

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- Do not force children to go
- Let them know what to expect
- Allow them to participate
- Consider other rituals to say goodbye

## Contact information

**Michelle J. Yep Martin, Psy.D., M.S., M.A.**

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Phone: (907) 227-5802

[myepmartin@gmail.com](mailto:myepmartin@gmail.com)

[www.michelleYepMartin.com](http://www.michelleYepMartin.com)

