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Starfish, Mental Wellbeing in Education

Leading on Bereavement Part 3
Remembering and Healing



By the end of the hour we will ...



Know the common signs of complex grief & what to do about it



Framework (including pitfalls) and ideas for acts of remembrance



Have thought ahead about managing transitions



Questions

Session One – Getting Ahead



It's personal: we all experience grief and bereavement – and it is a different experience for each of us



Knowledge helps: models are useful and help us to share understanding of the experience



Covid19/Lockdown adds complexity: Intensity, Isolation, Delay



Change is possible: Action Planning helps mitigate the impact & preparing now is the right time



We're human: Leaders need to look after themselves, reflect on their own responses & play to their strengths

Session Two – Organisation Wide



We can use our teacher skills: understanding of death develops by age/stage → we can teach it with age appropriate vocab/techniques



Being observant matters: we can see signs if we look carefully (Behaviours, physical signs, emotional clues)



Trust and honesty: if we don't know say so to avoid myths, gossip and struggling alone



It's a team effort: Building skills & 'putting it on the radar' creates a safety net & spreads the load

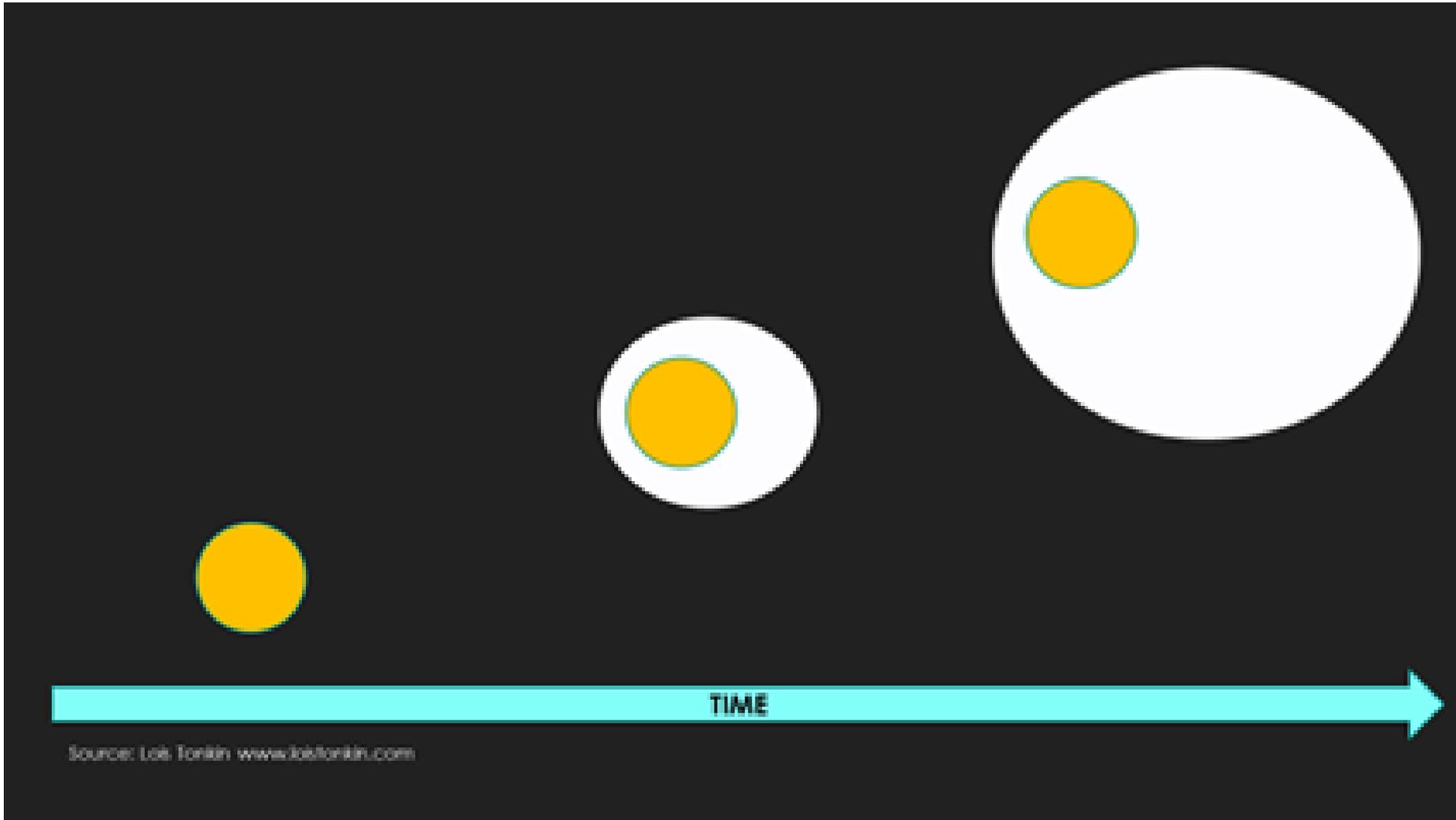


Coming to terms: talking about death is a life-long skill

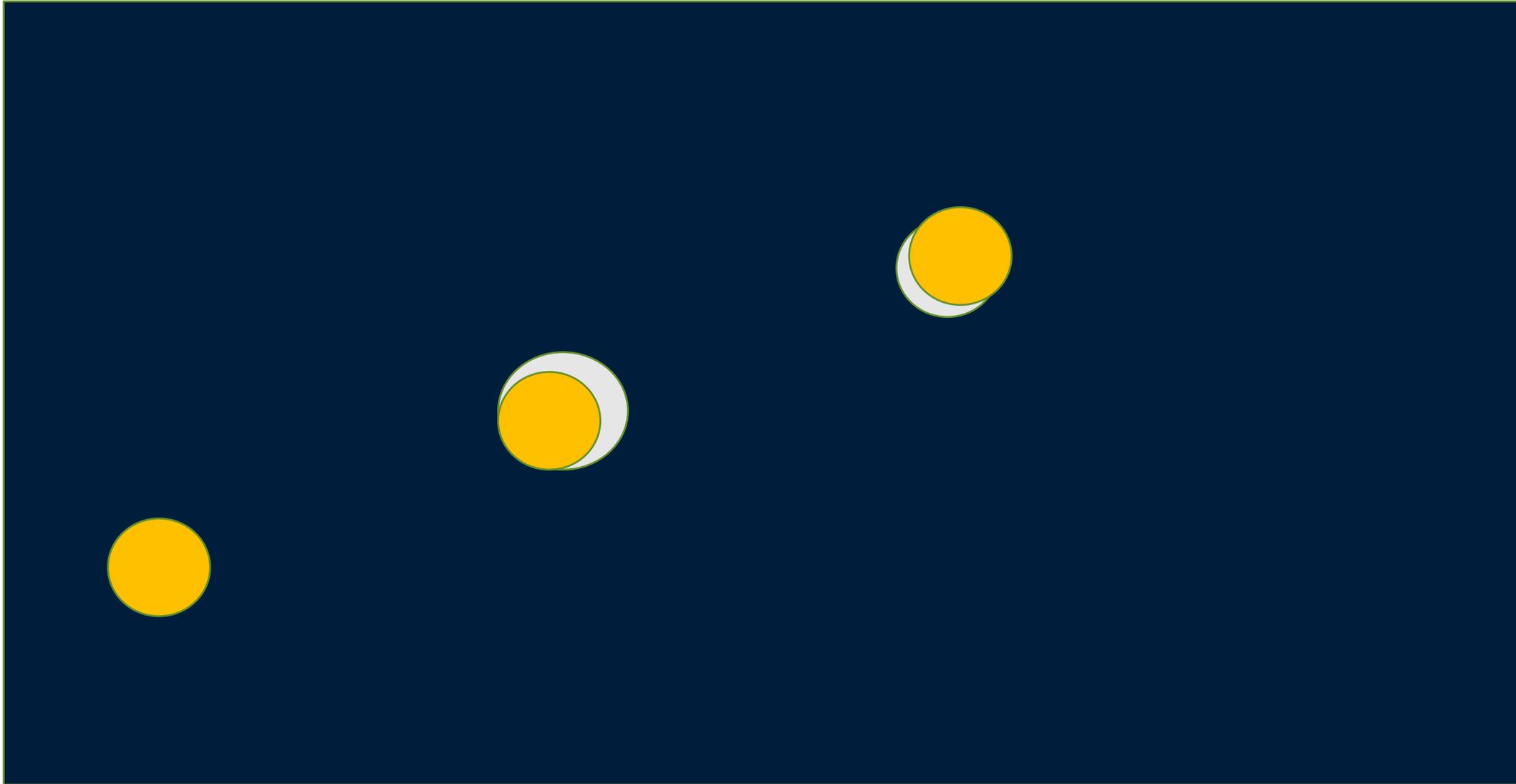
Complex Grief



Lois Tonkin: Fried Egg Model of Grief



Complex Grief: the experience of grief either continues to dominate or re-emerges and impacts on the person's ability to thrive



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKY-smJ6aBQ>

Complex Grief:

A persistent form of intense grief in which maladaptive thoughts and dysfunctional behaviors are present along with continued yearning, longing and sadness and/or preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the person who died.

Grief continues to dominate life and the future seems bleak and empty.

Or...

Grief is like a town without a bypass...and it's also like a teenager: it does what it wants when it wants.

Al Murray, The Pub Landlord for Griefencounter.org.uk



Complex Grief

Why does it happen?

- Circumstances of loss – especially trauma or unexpected/sudden death
- Relationship to the person who died
- Other losses (esp. in early life)
- Other vulnerabilities/disadvantage/ACE
- Existing/underlying Mental Health conditions
- Personality/Mindset
- Unacknowledged / disenfranchised grief
- We may not be able to explain it

Not well understood yet → it's about knowing the individual

***Intensity/frequency/impact of grief symptoms – usually 6 months +
BUT can vary and re-emerge later***

Warning Signs

- Often crying/ visible signs of distress
- Closed off feelings/numb
- Unable to cope with normal routines/daily living (workload/absence/memory/ organisation)
- Drinking, drugs, risk taking behaviour, gambling, suicidal warning 'invitations'
- Extreme reactions/loss of control
- Withdrawal from friends/social network
- Rejects support
- Negative/hopeless outlook
- Extreme bitterness or anger
- Feeling a significant part of self has died
- Obsessive focus on dead person/adopting their traits
- Longer term ill health (physical and mental)
- Suicidal thoughts or behaviours

Reflective Exercise

How do you feel about personally approaching someone you think is experiencing complex grief?

What resources/skills do you already have in your setting to draw on?

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Not well understood yet → it's about knowing the individual & remembering it's hard work sometimes

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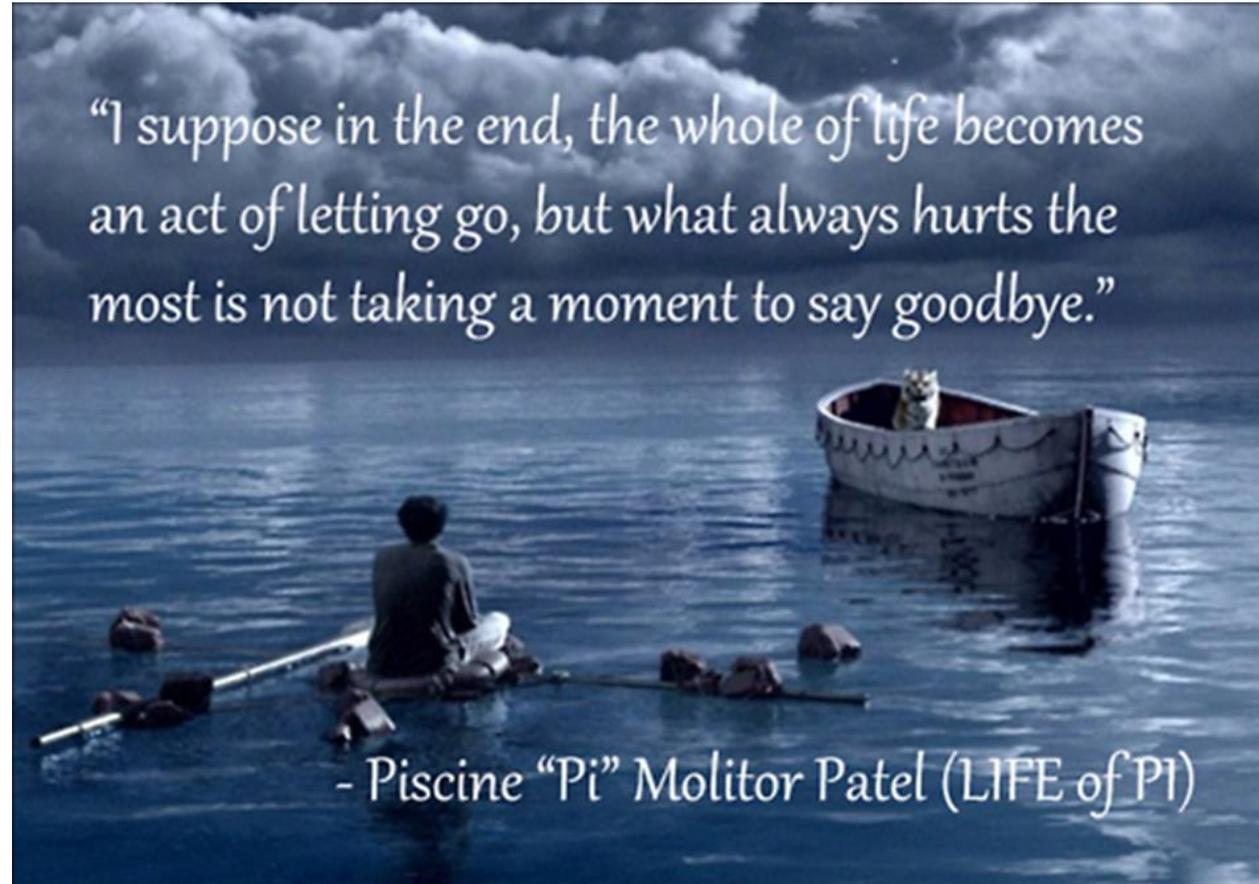
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What do we need to do?

- Weave bereavement knowledge into the culture
- Ensure records/awareness of situation are kept and handed on
Delegate the responsibility for remember
- Build trust from beginning
- Watch and record concerns
- Use MHFA skills/bereavement/counselling resources ASK & LISTEN
- Flag concerns in line with policies (safeguarding/wellbeing/pastoral)
- Signpost to professional help (GP, CAMHS, bereavement counselling)
- Patience and open to helping
- Support families/rest of friend/teacher network as well (inc. staff supporting pupils)
- ***Do not ignore concerns – long term impact if left unresolved***

Acts of remembrance – A framework for planning



“I suppose in the end, the whole of life becomes an act of letting go, but what always hurts the most is not taking a moment to say goodbye.”

- Piscine “Pi” Molitor Patel (LIFE of PI)

What is the role of acts of remembrance?

'Children learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviour in adults' (Worden)

- Rituals are one of our most ancient and effective methods for handling loss
- Events and acts which help to express grief and also contain it so that it seems more manageable
- A reminder of a significant event
- Permanently remind us of lives lost
- Comfort in shared (or solo) memories and wishes/hopes/regrets
- Allows unrecognised/disenfranchised grief to be expressed too
- Gives a name to feelings even if they are difficult (normalises/ bring into open the grieving experience)

Remember: in Covid19 Lockdown, many will not have been able to attend funerals and therefore other rituals may have increased importance

Reflecting on the role in your setting

What experience do you have/ how do you already mark a death in your community? (events or spaces/installations)

Does Covid19 mean we need to address broader remembering differently now? In the future?

Are we marking Covid19 / 2020 as a one-off (and if so, what about the deaths last year or the ones still to come?)

Is it more manageable to mark return/acknowledge/re-connect then think about a quiet memorial place/event for later?

Guidelines/ Things to consider

- What is the aim of the event/ activity?
- What kind of rituals do you want to create?
 - Within setting or wider community?
 - Private/individual
 - One-off
 - Annual
 - Anniversary
 - Return to setting
 - Temporary
 - Permanent

Guidelines/ Things to consider

- Amount of time/ money / people involved to organise
- Who needs to be involved/informed?
 - Invite staff, pupils and family
 - Keep Governing Board / Relevant bodies up to date
- Planning permission/site safety
- Cultural/ religious sensitivities
- Timing
- Location
- Pre and post event support
- Managing donations
- Implications for future (policy consistency of approach)
- Include time to prepare and rehearse inputs eg poetry, readings, music
- Remember staff welfare when remembering pupils – also affected
- Media interest
- Social media management

Right is better than rushed

IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES



Start fundraising with
JustGiving



Pitfalls

- Glamorising death (especially if a young person or suicide) → seek guidance from specialist eg. Papyrus or The Compassionate Friends
- Creating accidental reminders → make it somewhere you choose to go not pass directly by
- Assuming what is needed → involve family, friends, siblings, (remember family may wish to be invited but not attend)
- Creating a precedent → think through consequences for next time
- Avoiding the decision (so that self-organised events by friends/family fill the vacuum) → Plan ahead/ make a call on it
- Creating a 'surprise' trigger → prepare carefully to talk about it beforehand, create an alternative for those who opt out
- Failing to support overwhelming feelings/ grief which arises from the event → plan in follow up time and signposting to support. Avoid end of day or just before weekend. Ensure communication home so families can support

Pitfalls

- Failing to build in maintenance plan when organising a permanent memorial → don't rush decisions
- Missing someone out → make it inclusive / self – elective
- Forgetting social media – e.g. memorialising Facebook pages
- The 'hierarchy of death' we carry inside us might make us judge or underestimate the intensity of grief → don't pre-judge, stay open to listening
- Pushing people to talk about it when they are not ready → their pace not yours
- Not involving young people in the planning → give them a voice and a role
- Neglecting the smaller rituals e.g. classroom layout/start of the first day back → train staff to have confidence to deal and talk to pupils about how to handle these

Anniversaries and Triggers

- Significant dates may stir up grief and sadness

e.g. Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, anniversary of loss, birthday, Weddings, Christmas, Ramadan, graduation day, results day...

- Often the behaviours emerge before and after such dates and may not even be consciously recognised by the individual



Education settings often build assemblies or even topics around these events – that's why we have to remember the individual life stories



Managing Transitions



‘Grief is not always about death, but it is always about attachment and separation. Any loss can engender it’

Grief is a Journey, Dr K. J. Doka



Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

Khalil Gibran

Behaviour gives us a clue to notice and listen



Behaviour prompts us to wonder... what's really happening?



Reflective Exercise

- What are the transitions in your setting (as experienced from a student P.O.V)
- What do you do to prepare students?
- What systems are in place to ensure a robust 'baton pass'?
- Where are the weak spots?
- What could you do about them?

		Action Steps	By who? By when?	Resources needed
Communications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do we have a clear communications plan for staff or pupil death? 2. Do we have an out of hours and emergency plan? 3. Do our plans take into account social distancing, lockdown and unique circumstances of Covid crisis for deaths student, family and staff member or their family) 			
Recording Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do we have a way of recording information so that it gets passed on? (including statutory reporting if relevant) 2. Do we have a way of having a consistent way of raising concerns? 3. Do we have a way of making sure key dates/anniversaries are remembered/recognised? 			
Managing transitions (including return after lockdown)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have we got a plan for finding out who is bereaved during lockdown? 2. Have we included a sensitive question in change of setting information? 3. Have we got a process for handing it on when students move on? 			

Remember to include staff arrivals/departures as well



Plan for the worst, hope for the best

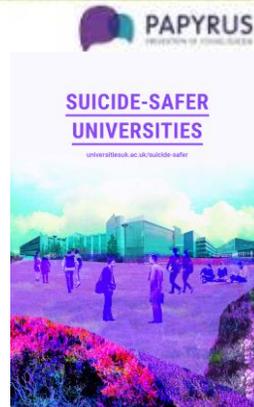
Vulnerability in transition may be heightened after Covid19 lockdown (general increase in uncertainty about the future)





Suicide prevention links

- Higher risk of suicide if connected to a suicide
- Higher risk of suicide if someone close to them dies (remember celebrities can feel very close)
- Have to rule it out and ask directly rather than assume
- Suicide prevention policy/ Suicide Prevention Training
Papyrus UK, Zero Suicide Alliance, Stayingsafe.net





Final Reflections

- What are the key messages you have taken from the session(s)?
- What needs to happen?
- What do you need to do to get that started?



'The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now'

Accelerate change
Community Wide
Take responsibility

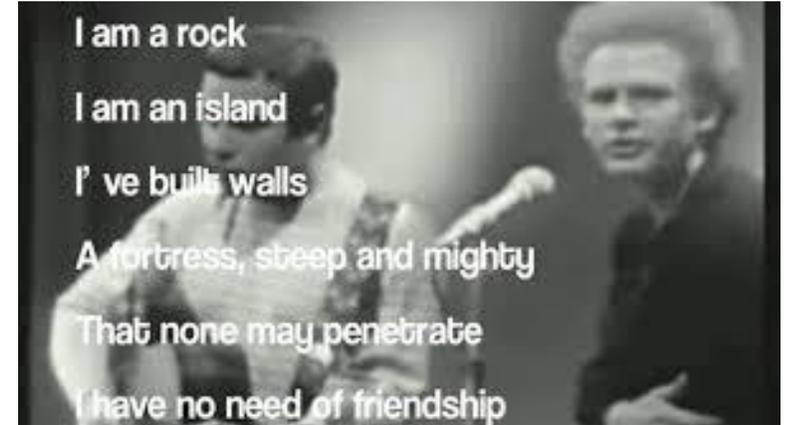


Closing Thoughts

Anything you love can be taken away from you and yet, if you really have nothing to lose, you have nothing. Dr. Richard Kalish

“Everything that has a beginning has an ending. Make your peace with that and all will be well.”

The Buddha



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKY-smJ6aBQ>

*May the road rise to greet you,
May the wind be ever at your back,
May the sun shine warm upn your face,
the rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again may your God
hold you in the palm of their hand.*

Trad Irish Blessing, adapted in memory of the late Dave Allan

Appendices

Ideas for Remembrance

Memory trees with messages

Poetry, letters

Real trees

Memory garden

Quiet place for reflection (in library?)

Memory book / book of condolence

Memory box

Message in a bottle

Candles

Special service or assembly

Memory stones (link to Winston's Wish assembly)

Photos and messages collage

Author visits & relevant books

Tibetan prayer flags

Memorial Plaque

Fundraising activities

Volunteering linked to the person/situation

Reflect the individual eg. Sporting event/concert

Audio or film messages which could be collated as a whole school message.

Individual works of art, which could be based on a common theme such as lockdown lives, time of year, special date, special place, special person, Winston's Wish 'Thanks'

A joint / individual remembrance poem

Cookbook in memory by contributing favourite recipes & memories

Perform or compose a relevant piece of music

Class/ Year group individual lines of poetry which could form book of condolence/ messages for the family

Graffiti wall/ Shapes to write on

Memoirs to share

Timecapsule reflecting on the life lived

...your own ideas will be the best!

Practical support

- Be kind
- Talk about their loved one/ the loss
- Monitor and record concerns
- Involve others (follow protocols in setting)
- Approach and signpost to professional help (G.P. /Counselling)
- Engage with wellbeing services internally or externally
- Support other family members/team members/classmates
- If you are concerned do not wait to raise concerns →be helpfully curious

Behavioural

Regression (books, films. Toys, friends, language, food)

Continuation of normal activities
'Can I go and play now?' (esp younger)

Lashing out at...others/God/the one who died/self/system/anyone in range → fights, disruptive behaviour

Absenteeism

Loss of interest/effort in work

Difficulty concentrating/seem to zone out

Disorganised

Sullen

Behaviour is a visible sign of what someone may be dealing with/trying to say (they may not even know this themselves)

Behavioural

Irritable

Clinginess

dependency

Slower thinking

Vulnerable to bullying/being bully

Avoid feelings/upsetting others/don't want to talk about it

Unwilling (unable?) to obey instructions

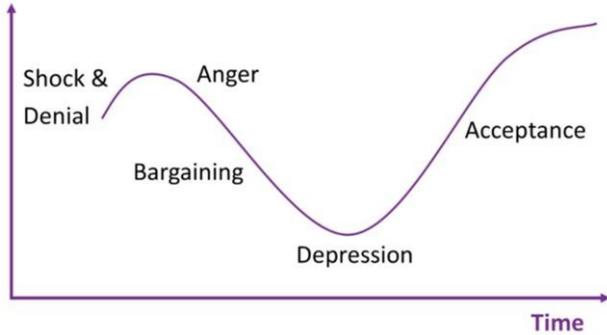
Appear to over-react to minor events

Breakdown of friendships

Unwilling to play/engage with peers

Reluctance to go to school/leave at end of day

Useful Models of Grief Experience



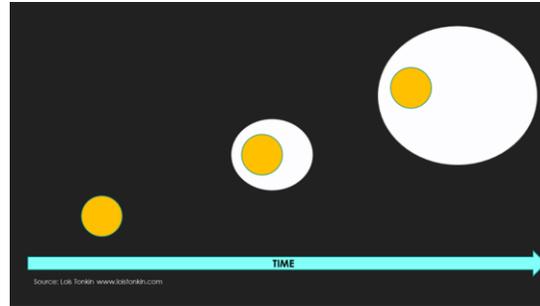
E. Kubler Ross

Worden's Tasks of Mourning

Task #1 To Accept the Reality of the Loss	Task #2 To Work Through the Pain of Grief
Task #3 To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing	Task #4 To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Embarking on a New Life

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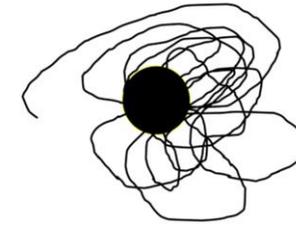
Worden



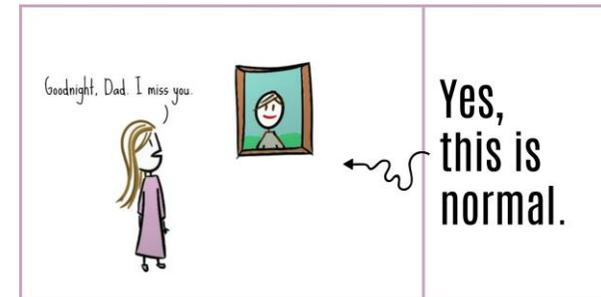
Lois Tonkin Growing around Grief: 'Fried Egg'



Strobe & Schutt Dual Process



P. Sowa



Klaas Continuing Bonds



events

www.ascl.org.uk/calendar



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