



Revolutionize Grief Support

For Long-term Care
Home Residents

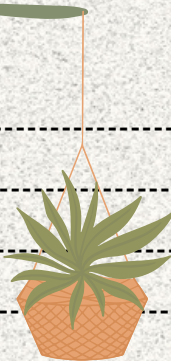
**A Toolkit for
Everyone**

Created by Chloe Tse

Brock
University

**HOSPICE
NIAGARA**
helping you live well

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Background

This project, focused on strengthening grief support for Long-Term Care Home (LTCH) residents, emerged as a practicum opportunity led by Chloe Tse, a Master of Applied Gerontology student at Brock University in May to August 2023. In collaboration with Hospice Niagara's Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultant (PPSMC) team and grief support team, our goal was twofold: (1) to gather a collection of grief supports for the use of frontline practitioners in LTCHs across the Niagara Region, enhancing their capacity to offer exceptional grief support, and (2) to advocate for systemic enhancements to address residents' psychosocial needs.

This journey encompassed three stages. Beginning with a thorough literature review, we extracted updated evidence-based recommendations for person-centered grief support practices at residential care settings. Subsequently, a needs assessment engaged key stakeholders to uncover existing gaps in knowledge and services within grief support. Culminating in this booklet, an educational resource was crafted to transform this knowledge into practical strategies, ready to be incorporated into the fabric of daily service at each LTCH.

As frontline practitioners, we create the nurturing environment where residents can grow around their grief. Envisioning a future where every LTCH staff member is grief and trauma-informed, we are committed to offer training to empower staff members to timely identify needs and provide compassionate grief support.

Prioritizing training equips us to empower residents with strength and resilience during their darkest times. May this resource be your stepping stone to embrace grief, and ignite your commitment to nurturing growth and healing in the hearts of those you care.



Acknowledgement

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the individuals and organizations that have been instrumental in shaping this project.

I am profoundly thankful to the Master of Applied Gerontology program and its professors for providing an enriching educational journey. The ongoing academic support and guidance of Dr. Colleen Whyte, Melanie Elliott, and Tracey Schenck have been immeasurable throughout this process.

My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisors at Hospice Niagara, Sue Shipley (Senior Director, Clinical Services) and Mahoganie Hines (former Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultant), for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this journey. I would also like to thank Yvonne Nasri (Senior Director, People & Performance) for her unwavering support. My gratitude also extends to the entire Hospice Niagara team for providing me with learning opportunities in the field of grief support services.

Thank you all the volunteers and clients with whom I have had the privilege to work with. Your insights and experiences have enriched my understanding and passion for this work.

To our esteemed partners within LTCHs, who have graciously participated in the data collection process, your collaborative engagement has been integral to the project's development.

Collectively, your support, dedication, and expertise have been instrumental in the realization of this endeavor, and I am truly honored to acknowledge your contributions.

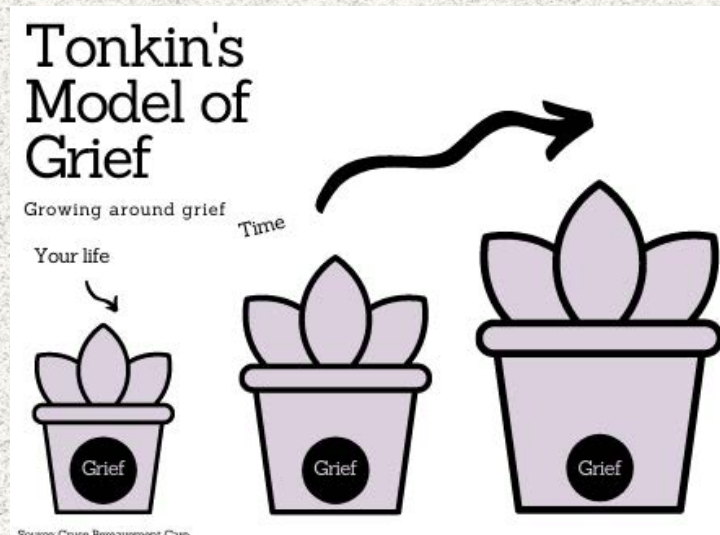


Introduction to Loss & Grief

We all experience loss and grief at some point in life.

Loss is the experience of something valuable being taken away, like the death of a loved one or major life changes (e.g. retirement or moving into a LTCH.)

Grief is the emotional response to loss—a complex and personal process. Everyone has a unique way of grieving, and there is no fixed timeline for the process.



Growing Around Grief

Tonkin (1996) suggests that grief becomes a part of a person's life story rather than something they must leave behind. It acknowledges that grief is an ongoing process, and that it is okay to continue to feel the loss while also finding ways to move forward with life.

The model does not try to diminish the pain of the loss but emphasizes the importance of finding ways to honor and remember the person or thing they lost, so as to live with a new balance between grief and life.

Further reading: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief/>

Loss & Grief when transitioning into LTCHs

Navigating the transition into a LTCH can bring forth a mixture of emotions, including loss and grief. As residents embark on this new chapter, the complexities of bidding farewell to familiar surroundings and routines may evoke various forms of grief. Understanding and addressing these emotions is crucial for fostering emotional well-being.

Abstract Loss

The loss of privacy, autonomy, independence, previous lifestyle, sense of control, worthiness, continuity, right to take risks, and the anticipated future loss, etc.



Material Loss

Left behind their former home, personal belongings, and the familiarity of the neighborhood, etc.

Social Loss

Separation from their spouse, family, friends, or pets



Possible Grief Responses when a Death Occurs

Physical

- **Fatigue:** Older adults might experience increased tiredness and physical exhaustion due to the emotional strain of grief.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Changes in sleep patterns, such as insomnia or oversleeping, can be common.
- **Appetite Changes:** Loss of appetite or overeating are possible reactions to grief.
- **Aches and Pains:** Physical discomfort, muscle tension, and headaches can arise due to the stress of grief.
- **Weakened Immune System:** Grief can suppress the immune system, making older adults more susceptible to illnesses.

Emotional

- **Sadness:** Feelings of deep sorrow, sadness, and mourning over the loss of a loved one.
- **Anguish:** Intense emotional pain, often accompanied by crying or sobbing.
- **Depression:** Prolonged feelings of hopelessness, emptiness, and low mood.
- **Anxiety:** Worries about the future, isolation, or changes in routine can lead to increased anxiety.
- **Guilt:** Older adults may feel guilty about things left unsaid or actions not taken before the death.



Possible Grief Responses when a Death Occurs

Cognitive

- **Confusion:** Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and disorientation due to overwhelming emotions.
- **Memory Triggers:** Certain sights, sounds, or places may trigger memories of the deceased.
- **Rumination:** Repetitive thoughts about the loss, often questioning its meaning and implications.
- **Difficulty Decision-Making:** Grief can impair decision-making abilities and lead to indecisiveness.
- **Denial:** A temporary refusal to accept the reality of the death, especially in the initial stages of grief.



Spiritual

- **Questioning Beliefs:** Grief can lead to questioning one's faith, beliefs, and understanding of the afterlife.
- **Search for Meaning:** A quest to find deeper meaning and purpose in life after the loss.
- **Spiritual Solace:** Seeking comfort and support from religious or spiritual practices.
- **Anger Towards Higher Power:** Older adults might experience anger or resentment towards a higher power due to the loss.
- **Existential Reflection:** Contemplation about life, death, and the nature of existence.

Possible Grief Responses when a Death Occurs

Social

- **Social Withdrawal:** Older adults might isolate themselves from social activities and interactions.
- **Changes in Relationships:** Grief can strain relationships with family and friends due to differences in coping mechanisms.
- **Increased Reliance:** Some older adults might become more dependent on their social support networks.
- **Seeking Support:** Some might seek companionship from family, friends, or support groups.
- **Difficulty Communicating:** Older adults might find it hard to express their emotions or communicate about the loss.



Grief is a complex and individualized process, and people may not experience all of these responses or may experience them to varying degrees. Additionally, these responses might change over time as the grieving process unfolds.

Therefore, as healthcare practitioners who provide daily care to older adults, it is crucial for us to remain **attentive and sensitive** in order to identify the evolving changes they might be undergoing throughout their grieving process. By recognizing their needs, we can provide appropriate support and interventions.

Some common **red flags** to watch for are listed in the next page.

Identifying who needs grief support

Verbal Clues

Feelings of sadness, loss, or missing their loved ones:

- "It's like a part of me is missing. I don't know how to go on without them"
- "I keep hoping I'll see them again. I find myself looking for them in every room, hoping they'll appear."
- "I dream about them often, and it's hard to wake up and realize they're gone"
- "I keep replaying the last moments we had together in my mind."
- "I don't know how to handle all these emotions. It's too much."

Feelings of guilt or regret:

- "Sometimes, I feel guilty for still being here while they're gone."
- "I wish I could have done more for them when they were still here."
- "I wish I had said goodbye properly."

Talking about their loved ones or sharing memories of them



**Prolonged
Isolation &
Withdrawal**

**Sudden
change in
physical
health**

**Changes in
eating
habits/sleep
disturbances**

**Apathy/Low
energy/Loss of
interest**

**Increased
Irritability,
agitation, or
restlessness**

**Prolonged
depressive
symptoms/
Suicidal
thoughts**

One Kind Word can Change

Someone's Entire Day



ALTERNATIVES to "HOW ARE YOU?"

IT'S GOOD TO HEAR YOUR VOICE.	WHAT'S THE VIBE TODAY?	I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU.	WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT OR <u>NOT</u> TALK ABOUT TODAY?	WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?	I REALLY APPRECIATE YOU BEING IN MY LIFE.	DID ANYTHING MAKE YOU SMILE TODAY?
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN THINKING ABOUT ?	WHAT'S IN YOUR TABS THESE DAYS?	WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN LISTENING TO ?	WANNA TAKE 3 DEEP BREATHS TOGETHER?	I CARE ABOUT YOU.	WHAT'S ONE NICE THING YOU DID FOR YOURSELF LATELY?	I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO TALKING TO YOU.
HOW'S YOUR HEART TODAY?	HOW HAVE YOU BEEN SLEEPING?	WHAT'S ALIVE FOR YOU IN THIS MOMENT?	WHAT WAS YOUR DAY (OR WEEK) LIKE?	WHAT ARE 2 EMOTIONS YOU'RE FEELING IN THIS MOMENT?	WHAT WOULD MAKE THIS A GOOD CONVERSATION FOR YOU ?	WHAT'S ONE THING YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO?
HAS ANYTHING BEEN ON YOUR MIND THAT YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?	IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D LOVE TO TALK ABOUT TODAY?	WHAT TOPICS ARE ON OR OFF THE TABLE TODAY?	I'M REALLY GLAD WE'RE FRIENDS.	SOMETHING I REALLY APPRECIATE ABOUT YOU IS: _____	IS THERE ANYTHING YOU NEED RIGHT NOW?	IF WE COULD TALK ABOUT ANYTHING YOU WANTED, WHAT WOULD IT BE ?
I MISS YOU SO MUCH.	{JUST LISTEN}	GET MORE CREATIVE CONNECTION IDEAS IN THE BOOK "CONNECTED FROM AFAR" BY @KATVELLOS_AUTHOR				

Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

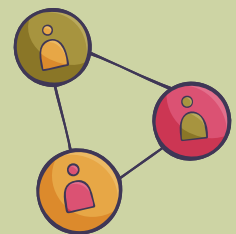
in the context of grief support for LTCH residents

Safety: Within the long-term care home, the **physical** safety of the residents is ensured through measures such as fall prevention, proper medication management, and a hazard-free environment. Equally important is the establishment of **psychological** safety. Creating an atmosphere where residents feel comfortable expressing their emotions, memories, and grief-related thoughts without judgment.



Trustworthiness + Transparency: In the context of grief, decisions related to care plans, therapies, and interventions are made transparently. This transparency helps build **trust** between the residents, their families, and the staff. Open **communication** ensures that everyone is on the same page, which is especially important when residents are navigating with various forms of grief and may require personalized approaches to support.

Peer Support: Connecting individuals who have experienced similar forms of grief into the LTCH's community can be valuable. Their **shared experiences** can offer comfort, validation, and a sense of acceptance that might be difficult for staff members to fully understand.

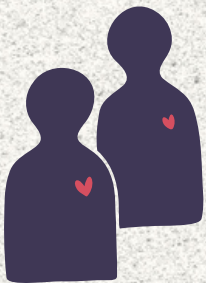


Further reading: <https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/>

Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

in the context of grief support for residents

Collaboration: Grief is a deeply personal experience, and collaborative decision-making allows residents to have agency in their care plans. Recognizing that residents are **experts in their own experiences** of grief, staff members should actively involve them in discussions about their care and incorporate their preferences and needs into the decision-making process.



Empowerment: Grief can sometimes make residents feel powerless, but a trauma-informed approach empowers them by recognizing their **inherent strengths**. Staff members focus on building on these strengths, fostering **resilience**, and creating an environment where residents believe in their **capacity** to navigate and heal from their grief.

♥ ACCEPTANCE ♥

Humility + Responsiveness: Staff members in a LTCH should be aware of biases and stereotypes that might influence their interactions with residents living with different forms of grief.

By acknowledging and addressing these potential **biases**, staff members ensure that each resident's unique experience is validated and respected, regardless of factors like race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or age.

Further reading:

<https://sudden.org/academic-experts/making-sense-of-traumatic-bereavement/>

Grief support: best practices

1. Acknowledgement & Validation

Unaddressed grief can deeply affect residents' mental well-being. Instead, by creating a safe space for residents to openly share their emotions and mourn their losses, they can work through the different losses that come with aging, find ways to make sense of their grief, and reshape their personal stories.



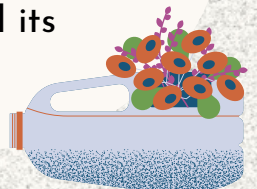
2. Peer Support

Establishing relationships and supportive networks among peers within the LTCH becomes especially valuable when individuals identify shared experiences encompassing both death and non-death-related loss and grief. Through shared experiences, a sense of empathy, understanding, and mutual support emerges, concurrently bolstering social recognition of grief.



3. Access to timely Psychological Support

Evidence proved the importance for residents to have access to timely help from mental health experts. This means that they should be able to talk to people who know about different kinds of therapy individually or joining a group where they can share their thoughts and feelings. Adopting a trauma-informed care approach can also enable staff to recognize signs of trauma, understand its impact, and provide optimal support to prevent re-traumatization.



To acknowledge and validate grief, You may say...

"I'm so sorry for your loss. It's okay to grieve and feel however you're feeling. I'm here to support you through this difficult time. Just take all the time you need."

- Express empathy and validate their feelings of grief, letting them know it is natural to mourn their loss and to experience this range of feelings.
- Emphasize your support and ensure that they can grieve at their own pace.

Be Present



"Is there anything specific you'd like to talk about or any way I can support you right now? If you don't want to go there, no problem. Whenever you feel like talking, I'm here to listen. "

- Encourage open communication and provide reassurance that their emotions and memories are valued.

"Your loved one was a special person, and their memory will be cherished. It's okay to miss them deeply. Tell me about your loved one if you wanted to share."

- Validate the significance of their loved one and acknowledge the depth of their grief.
- Offer your support and be available for conversation if they wish to share their stories and feelings.

Be Patient

To acknowledge and validate grief, **Avoid** saying...

"I know how you feel; I went through the same thing."

- Avoid comparing their grief to your own experiences, as everyone's grief is unique.



"At least they lived a long life. You should be grateful for the time you had together."

- Avoid minimizing their loss or try to find silver linings.
- Avoid telling them what they should feel or making assumptions about their emotions.

"Don't cry; it will only make things harder for you. You should stay strong for others."

- Avoid suggesting that they need to suppress their emotions to be strong for others. Encourage healthy expressions of feelings instead.



"It's time to move on and focus on the present. Keep yourself busy to forget about it."

- Avoid pressuring them to move forward as grief takes time, and coping is a personal process.
- Grief is not something we have to forget, but to live with.



Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief

Formal Room Blessing Ritual

A ceremony conducted by spiritual and religious care staff in St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario after a resident passes away in a room. During this ceremony, they say prayers, share memories, and welcome the next resident who will move in. The ritual helps everyone acknowledge their grief and find closure. It also creates a peaceful and thoughtful atmosphere for the new resident who will be moving into the room. It provides comfort and support to those struggling with loss and helps them process their feelings of grief.

Further reading:

Maitland, J., Brazil, K., & James-Abra, B. (2012). "They don't just disappear": acknowledging death in the long-term care setting. *Palliative & supportive care*, 10(4), 241-247.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951511000964>



The Reflection Room®

The Reflection Room® are evidence-based art installation spaces found in 25 LTCHs in Ontario. These rooms are designed to create a calm and supportive environment where people can talk and think about difficult topics like dying, death, loss, and grief. It is a place where people can express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions without judgment.

Visit their website: <http://thereflectionroom.ca>

Further reading:

Carter, C., Giosa, J., Rizzi, K., Oikonen, K., Stephenson, B., & Holyoke, P. (2023). The Reflection Room®: Moving from Death-Avoiding to Death-Discussing. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228231192163>



Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief

Creative Art Expression

In times of profound loss, words may fall short in expressing the depths of grief within one's soul. Creative art expression provides a liberating outlet for these emotions, offering a free form of expression that can lead to healing. Through art, individuals living with grief can reconstruct and paint the narrative of their loss, finding understanding and closure along the way.



1. Nagomi Art

"Nagomi Art" is a therapeutic form of art from Japan that aims to bring peace and relaxation through drawing. It focuses on the calming effect of the creative **process**, not just the final product.

This art provides a comforting space for processing grief by using gentle pastel strokes and a meditative approach. It helps acknowledge and validate feelings, leading to healing and acceptance.



[Q Japan Pastel Hope Art Association \(JPHAA\) X](#)

Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief

2. Journaling



Grief journaling is a powerful tool for individuals to cope with the loss of a loved one. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Each person's journal will be unique and meaningful to them. Do not worry about judging or editing while writing. Simply share your feelings honestly, as unedited self-narration is the most effective way to start the healing process.



Some journaling prompts:

- Today, I am really missing...
- The hardest time of day is...
- I have been feeling a lot of...
- I feel most connected to my loved one when...
- I can honor my loved one by...
- A comforting memory of my loved one is...
- Whenever I start to feel overwhelmed by pain, regret, guilt, or despair, I will...
- To be more compassionate towards myself, I am willing to try...
- I am grateful for...



GRIEF

Affirmations



I can have a good time and still be grieving.



I try to be gentle with myself while grieving.



I did the best I could with what I had at the time.



I can accept help, without shame, when I need it.



I am allowed to grieve however feels right, with no time limits.



I deserve to create and respect my own boundaries.



South Central Region

Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief



3. Memory keepsake - Repurposing the clothes of your loved one



Creating memory items from a loved one's clothing is a comforting way to process grief. It involves transforming their clothes into meaningful keepsakes like quilts or pillow covers.



Making these items helps keep the memories alive, providing a tangible connection to the person who passed away.

The process can be therapeutic, allowing individuals to remember and cherish moments with their loved one while finding solace in the act of crafting something special in their honor.

These memory items become cherished symbols of love, comfort, and healing, helping in the journey of grief recovery.



Death does not put an end to Love

Continuing Bonds

After death and loss



The relationship will change, but maintaining connections after loss is healthy and allowed

Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief

4. Planting Potted Indoors

Taking care of plants offers a sense of purpose and responsibility, providing a nurturing experience similar to caring for oneself or a loved one.

Indoor plants bring life and beauty to the living space, creating a soothing and calming environment. This greenery can serve as a comforting reminder of growth and renewal, helping residents find hope and solace during difficult times.

Connecting with nature through indoor gardening can also reduce stress, improve mood, and create a sense of connection to the natural world, all of which can support the grieving process and contribute to overall well-being.

 The Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association 



Like scattered seeds, memories bloom *forever.*

Acknowledgement & Validation of Grief

5. Wind Phone



The "Wind Phone" is a special phone booth in Japan where people go to talk to their loved ones who have passed away. Even though the phone is not connected, it helps people find comfort and solace as they share their feelings and memories with the deceased. Talking to their loved ones or sitting in silence helps them process their grief and find healing and closure. It has become a place where people can connect with their emotions and find support during difficult times of loss.



A wind phone has been installed at Ball's Falls Conservation Area, Lincoln, ON in July, 2023.



To facilitate peer support, You may say...

"Some of our residents have found comfort in talking to each other about their losses. If you ever feel like talking to someone who may understand, we can help facilitate those connections."

- Offer to help them connect with others who are open to sharing their grief experiences.



**Let's
Grow
Together**

"We have a support group where residents can share their experiences and emotions with others who may be going through a similar grieving process. Would you like to join?"

- Encourage them to participate in the support group and connect with others who can relate to their grief.

Avoid saying...

"You wouldn't want to upset someone else by talking about your loss. Just try to keep it to yourself."

- Avoid suggesting that their grief could negatively impact others and discourage them from seeking peer support.
- Avoid making assumptions about how others may react and instead encourage open communication and support.



Activity Ideas for Peer Support Groups

Grief support groups in LTCH are like a warm hug for the heart. They provide a safe space to share feelings, memories, and learn how to cope. Being part of this group helps them heal and feel more connected with others in the big house.

Write a letter/make a card to your loved one

Grief walks

Share pictures & stories of your loved one

Talk about emotions & coping/self-care strategies

Mindfulness practices

Create a memory box with memories of their loved ones

Further reading:

How to facilitate a grief group:

<https://hearthousehospice.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RunningAGriefGroupToolkit.pdf>

Coping with loss workbook:

<https://mindremakeproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/COPING-WITH-LOSS-Final.pdf>





Letter Writing

to your beloved one

Letter writing offers a channel to express unspoken emotions, revisit cherished memories, and maintain a bond with your beloved one.

Here are some steps to guide you through the process of starting the letter writing journey:

1. **Choose a comfortable setting:** Find a quiet and comfortable place where you can focus without distractions. Create an atmosphere that feels calming to reflect
2. **Gather some materials:** Have paper, a pen, and some meaningful items like photographs or items that remind you of your loved one
3. **Begin with a greeting:** Start your letter with a simple greeting to help set the tone and create a sense of connection
4. **Reflect on your emotions:** Before diving into details, take a moment to reflect on how you are feeling. Are you sad, grateful, or nostalgic? Acknowledging your emotions is important for this task
5. **Sign Off:** Choose a closing that feels right to you, such as "With love," "Always in my heart," or something personal that you often used when communicating with them
6. **Take Your Time:** There is no rush. Take breaks if you need to. The process might bring up emotions, so allow yourself the space to pause and return to it later if necessary.

There is no right or wrong way to write this letter. It is a personal expression of your feelings and thoughts. Don't worry about perfection - what matters is the sincerity and love behind your words.



Prompts for Letter Writing

to your beloved one



The following prompts aim to provide a thoughtful guide to communicate and find solace in the process:

- **Cherished Moments:** Reflect on a special memory you shared with your loved one during your life.
 - I have enjoyed...
 - A favourite memory I have with you is...
 - I am so proud of you because...
- **Life Updates:** Share updates about your life since they passed. Are there any family news or changes you would like to tell them about?
 - You know what?
 - I want you to know...
- **Gratitude for Time Together:** Express gratitude for the time you spent together.
 - Thank you so much for...
 - You are special to me because...
- **Feelings of Missing:** Express the emotions that arise from missing them. How do you cope with these feelings now?
 - I miss you so much when...
 - I feel...
 - When I miss you, I will...
- **Continuing Traditions:** Any traditions, values, or practices you have continued in their honor?
 - I still...
 - You have taught me about...
- **Unspoken Words:** Is there something you wished you had told them? Take this opportunity to say what was left unsaid.
 - I love you... I am sorry...
- **Hope for Legacy:** Share your hopes for how their memory will continue to influence your family and future generations.
 - I hope...

Emotions and Self-care Strategies Worksheet

used in a group setting

Introduction:

In our grief support group, we understand that dealing with loss brings a mix of emotions. This worksheet is designed to help you reflect on your feelings and discover ways to care for yourself during this journey.

1. Reflect on Your Emotions:

Think about the emotions you have been experiencing since your loss. Check the ones that resonate with you and add any others you are feeling.

- Sadness
- Acceptance
- Anxiety
- Relief
- Regret
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Numbness
- Confusion
- Other: -----

2. Moments of Strength:

Recall times when you felt strong or coped well with your emotions. Share with the group what helped you during those moments.

e.g. I felt strong when I was able to talk openly about my loved one's passing.
e.g. During a tough day, I remembered the advice my partner always gave me, and it helped me stay grounded.

3. Sharing Self-Care Strategies:

Share self-care practices that have worked for you.

- Spending time outdoors/short walks/gentle exercises
- Listening to soothing music/watching a movie/TV show
- Creating art or craft
- Talking to a friend/family
- Writing a journal/reading a book
- Practicing meditation
- Other: -----



Emotions and Self-care Strategies Worksheet

used in a group setting

4. Setting Goals Together:

Discuss and brainstorm small steps you can take to support each other and yourselves. Share one goal you would like to try or work on.

e.g. Reach out to a friend or family member to talk about our feelings at least once this week.

e.g. Practice a relaxation technique, like deep breathing or meditation, every morning for 15 minutes.

5. Affirmations and Encouragement:

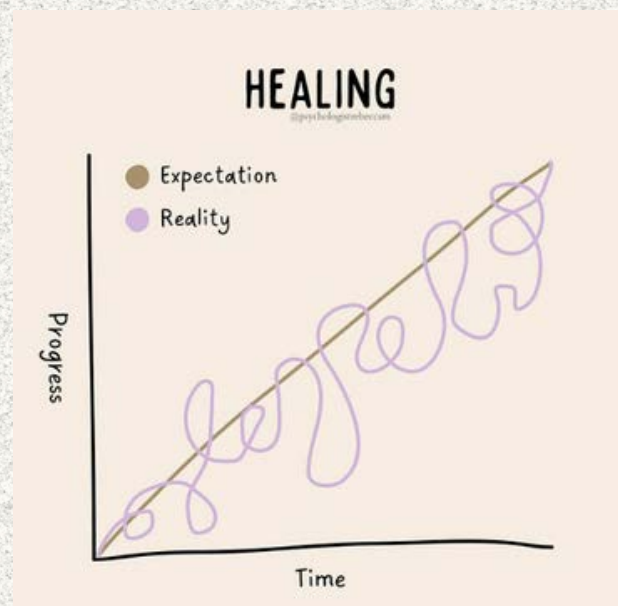
Offer a positive message or affirmation to a fellow group member or take one for yourself. Share or exchange these messages to provide encouragement.

"You are stronger than you know"

"Progress doesn't have to be big steps - even the smallest efforts matter."

Conclusion:

Grieving is a unique journey, and it is okay to seek support when needed. Use this worksheet as a tool to better understand your feelings and prioritize your well-being during this time. Feel free to revisit this worksheet and update your reflections and self-care strategies as you continue your journey.



Further reading:

<https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/healthy-unhealthy-coping-strategies>

Mindfulness Practices

Breathing Awareness

Breath awareness helps you focus on your breath, providing a sense of calm and centeredness.

1. **Sit comfortably:** Find a quiet place to sit comfortably, with your back straight and hands resting on your lap.
2. **Close your eyes:** If you're comfortable, gently close your eyes. If not, focus on a spot in front of you.
3. **Focus on breathing:** Pay attention to your breath. Feel the sensation of the air entering and leaving your body.
4. **Inhale and exhale:** Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four. Hold for a moment, then exhale through your mouth for a count of six.
5. **Stay present:** If your mind starts to wander, gently bring your focus back to your breath.
6. **Notice sensations:** Notice how your breath feels and how your body changes.
7. **Stay as long as needed:** Spend as much time as you like in this meditation, whether it is a few minutes or longer.
8. **Conclude:** When you are ready to finish, take a few deep breaths, open your eyes, and gently stretch.

🔍 Mindfulness for older adults ✕



Mindfulness Practices

Loving-Kindness

Loving-kindness meditation focuses on generating feelings of love, compassion, and kindness towards yourself and others, including your loved one.




1. **Find a quiet space:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position in a quiet and peaceful area.
2. **Close your eyes:** Gently close your eyes or keep them slightly open, whichever feels more comfortable.
3. **Take a deep breath:** Inhale slowly through your nose, and exhale through your mouth, letting go of any tension.
4. **Focus on your heart:** Place your hand on your heart, feeling the warmth and compassion within you.
5. **Repeat Positive Phrases:** In your mind, repeat phrases, such as "May I be happy. May I be healthy." As you say these, imagine sending love and comfort to yourself.
6. **Extend to others:** Gradually, visualize your loved one and repeat the phrases for them.
7. **Feel the Connection:** Imagine your love and kindness spreading like ripples, connecting you to the world.
8. **Take a Moment:** Stay with these feelings for a few minutes, acknowledging the sense of connection and warmth.
9. **Slowly Return:** When you are ready, gently bring your attention back to your breath and surroundings.

Further reading:

Reangsing, C., Rittiwong, T., & Schneider, J. K. (2021). Effects of mindfulness meditation interventions on depression in older adults: A meta-analysis. *Aging & Mental Health*, 25(7), 1181-1190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2020.1793901>

Young, L. A., & Baime, M. J. (2010). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Effect on Emotional Distress in Older Adults. *Complementary Health Practice Review*, 15(2), 59-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1533210110387687>

Creating a Memory Box/Jar



1. Gather supplies: Collect a box/jar of your choice, art supplies (markers, paints), decorative materials (fabric, ribbon), glue, scissors, photos, letters, and any items that remind you of your loved one.

2. Organize memories: Gather and arrange photos, letters, and mementos that hold special meaning inside the box in a way that feels personal to you.

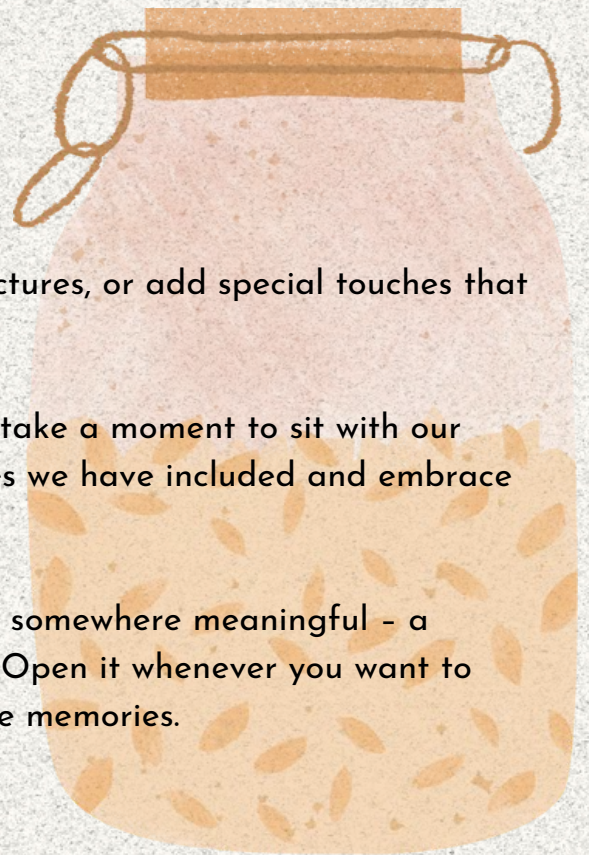
3. Create labels or tags: Attach small labels or tags to items in the box, explaining their significance. This can help you recall the context of each item.

4. Decorate the box: You can paint, glue on pictures, or add special touches that reflect your loved one's personality.

5. Reflect and embrace together: As a group, take a moment to sit with our completed memory box. Reflect on the memories we have included and embrace the sense of unity and support we share.

7. Display and cherish: Place your memory box somewhere meaningful - a bookshelf, bedside table, or a dedicated space. Open it whenever you want to connect with your loved one or find solace in the memories.

Creating this memory box as a group activity allows us to support each other, celebrate shared experiences, and acknowledge our inner strength. This tangible representation of our memories becomes a symbol of our ongoing journey towards healing.



Assess to Timely Psychological Support

Your presence means deeply to our residents. Regardless of your current role,, you have the power to notice when a resident is experiencing the challenging journey of grief. Recognizing signs of grief in residents and offering a compassionate hand can be life-saving. Your outreach can guide them towards the psychological support they might urgently need.

Psychologists/
Counselors/
Social workers

Hospice
Niagara

Grief
Network
Niagara

Canadian
Mental Health
Association,
Niagara

Victim
Services
Niagara

Alzheimer
Society,
Niagara Region

Bereavement
Ontario
Network

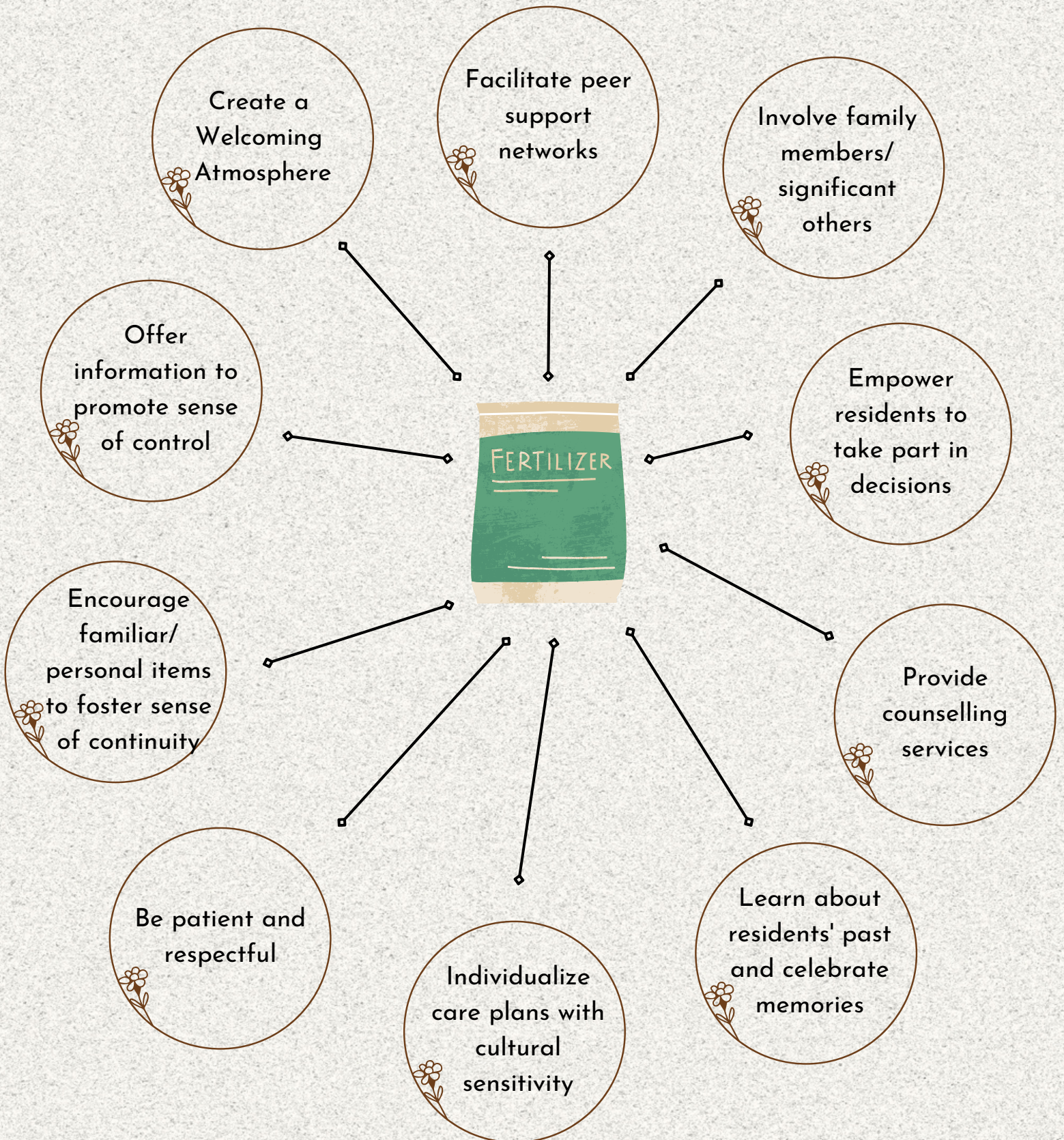
Behavioral
Supports
Canada

Crisis Outreach
and Support
Team (COAST)
1-866-550-5205

Further reading:

MacCourt, P. (2021). Supporting Mental Health and Well-Being in Community Residential Care Settings. Canadian Standards Association, Toronto, ON.

Facilitating the transition into LTCH





Grief Support for Residents who have cognitive deterioration

Observe non-verbal clues - body language, facial expressions, or changes in behaviors to understand their emotions.



Create a calming environment and avoid over-stimulation. Use clear and concise language to prevent confusion/frustration.



Offer physical comfort - holding their hand, or giving a gentle hug can offer warmth and reassurance.



Listen attentively and respond with empathy. Offer words of comfort, reminding them that they are cared for and safe.



Multi-sensory approaches - e.g. aromatherapy, soothing textures, or calming sounds to promote calm and well-being.



Collaborate with professionals to seek guidance in supporting residents with cognitive deterioration and grief.



Your presence and empathetic approach mean a lot to these residents. While their ability to express grief may be limited, your understanding, patience, and emotional support can contribute significantly to their comfort and well-being.

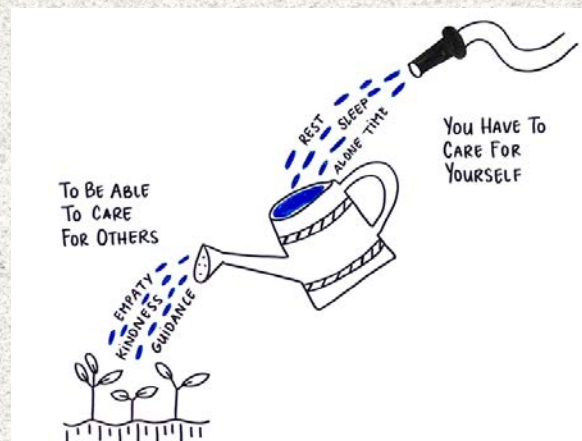
LTCH Staff's Grief & Self-Care

Within the realm of LTCHs, staff members often forge deep connections with residents. This interconnectedness, however, can give rise to unspoken feelings of grief - a phenomenon known as disenfranchised grief. If left unaddressed, it may lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout.



Cited from a research done in two LTCHs in Thurder Bay, Ontario, Canada:
Marcella, J., & Kelley, M. L. (2015). "Death Is Part of the Job" in Long-Term Care Homes: Supporting Direct Care Staff With Their Grief and Bereavement. *SAGE Open*, 5(1), 215824401557391-. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015573912>

Acknowledging and validating your grief, seeking support from peers and professionals, and implementing self-care strategies are crucial. By honoring your emotions, you enhance your ability to provide holistic care while nurturing your own emotional health.



Other Learning Opportunities for You

Your dedication to residents' well-being is truly remarkable. Your daily care provides a comforting space for their growth even in tough times like grief. Take a step towards enhancing your skills by exploring various learning opportunities. These resources can give you fresh insights, more knowledge, and better tools to support residents through their grief.



Certificate in Loss, Grief and Bereavement Studies

King's College

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/academics/thanatology/certificate-diploma-programs/>

Death, Dying and Bereavement Certificate

Wilfrid Laurier University

<https://continuingeducation.wlu.ca/public/category/courseCategoryCertificateProfile.do?method=load&certificateId=1053697&ref=academics%2Ffaculties%2Ffaculty-of-social-work%2Fprofessional-development%2Fcertificates%2Fdeath-dying-and-bereavement.html>

Education for Health Care Providers

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario

<https://www.hpcoco.ca/education-for-health-care-providers/>

Grief Continuing Education Workshops

What's your grief - A grief website for the rest of us

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/education-workshops/>

Never underestimate the power of a *planted seed.*

Other Learning Opportunities for You

Grief Education Certificate

University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)
Continuing & Professional Learning
https://cpl.oise.utoronto.ca/program_certificate/grief-education/

Long Term Care: Understanding and Responding to Grief

Canadian Virtual Hospice
<https://www.virtualhospice.ca/learninghub/>

MyGrief.ca

<https://mygrief.ca>

Palliative Care in Dementia Program

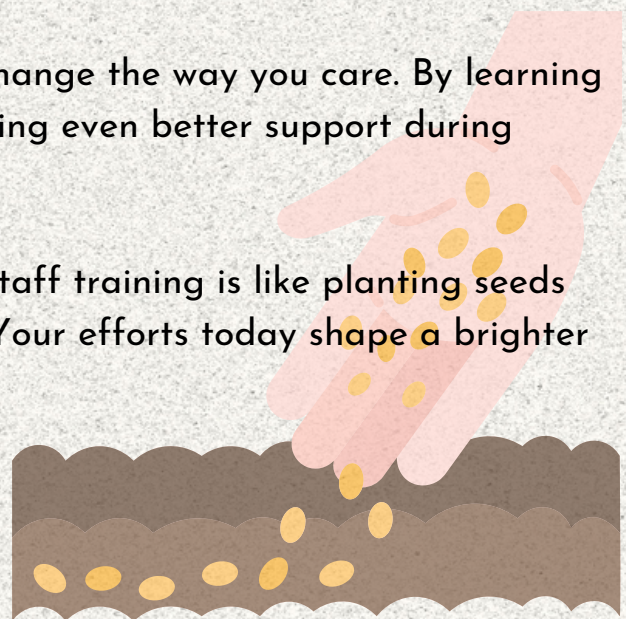
Alzheimer Society of Toronto
<https://alz.to/courses-learning-programs/dementia-palliative-care-training/>

Walking With Grief, Helping Others Deal with Loss

Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute
<https://ctrinstitute.com/topic/walking-with-grief/>

Discover a world of resources that can change the way you care. By learning more, you are setting the stage for offering even better support during challenging moments.

To our amazing managers, investing in staff training is like planting seeds that grow into lasting care and impact. Your efforts today shape a brighter tomorrow.





Nurturing Resilience:
Empowering Residents'
Growth Amidst Grief

