



# The Impact of Grief and Supporting Grieving Staff

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# Path for Today

The Impact of Grief



Tending to Grief



A Grief Supportive Workplace

# Why the Wendt Center?



“No one should have to  
grieve alone.”

~ William “Bill” Wendt  
Founder of Wendt Center  
circa 1977

# Settle In

Grounding  
Meditation

# Tending to Self



We will be discussing challenging topics that can elicit uncomfortable feelings.

Please tend to yourself:

- Breathe in for a count of four, exhale for a count of six
- Take a sip of ice water and trace the water down as you drink it
- Look up and notice three things in your space
- Stand up and stretch

# When Grief Enters the Room

# The Umbrella of Grief



- Absence of something cherished.
- Grief is about the relationship one has with another person/thing/experience/ pet/themselves
- It's not JUST the death of a loved one.
- When else might grief show up?

# Common MIS-Conceptions of Grief

It is a linear stage-based process

Relationships end when someone dies

Grief can be completed

Time heals all wounds

After a few months you are ready to go back to your routines

Distracting ourselves will make the pain go away

Bad things happen to help us grow

If you aren't crying you aren't grieving

The first year is the hardest

Grieving is best done alone

Talking about it makes you feel worse

Sadness is the primary emotion





# Grief Symptoms

Exhaustion

Changes in  
Sleep and  
Appetite

Headaches

Stomach  
Issues

Crying easily  
and often

Feeling numb

Desire to  
Isolate

Irritation

Forgetfulness

Difficulty  
concentrating

Disorganized

Yearning

# Grief Symptoms

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Stomach  
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Crying easily  
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Am I going  
crazy?

Irritate

Forgetfulness

Difficulty  
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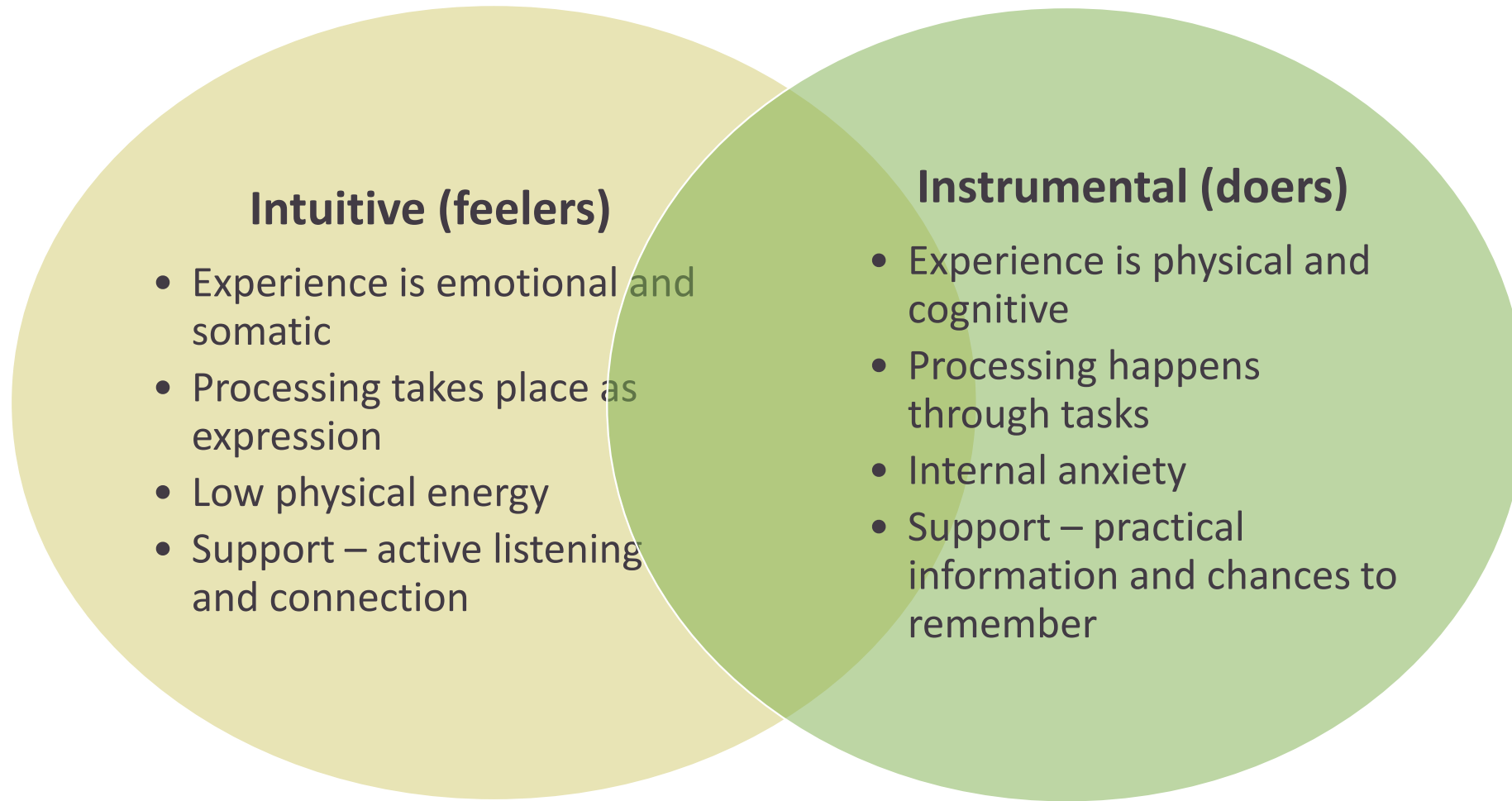
Yearning







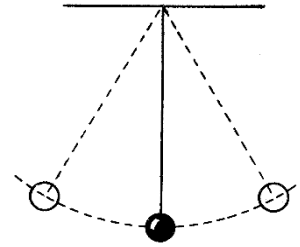
# Styles of Grieving



# Naming the Grief



# Pendulation in Grief



Integrated

Pain

- Crying
- Longing
- Remembering
- Memorializing
- Low motivation

Confidence

Capacity

Compassion

Joy

- Socializing
- Celebrating
- Setting goals
- Trying new things
- Increased motivation

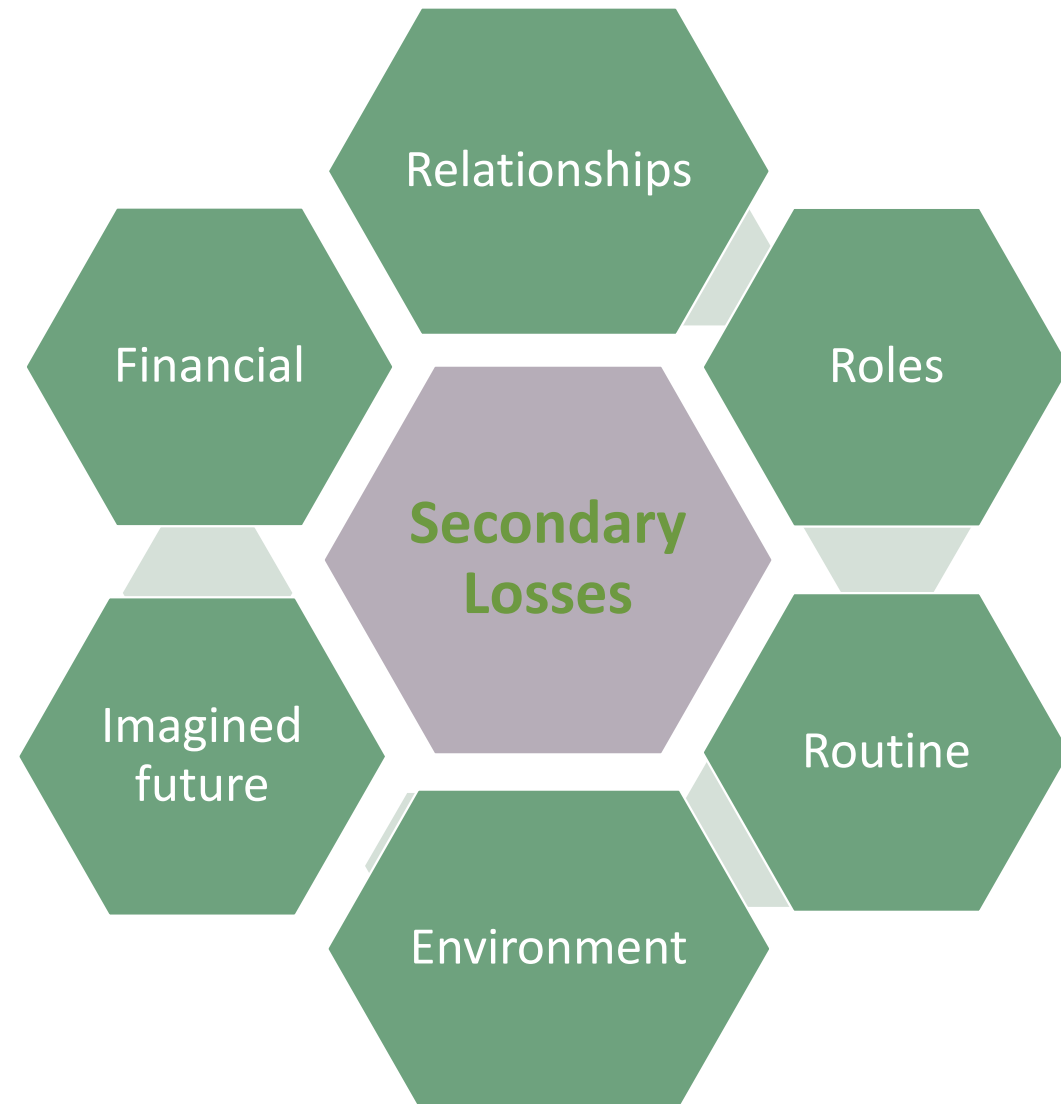


# The Losses Behind the Loss

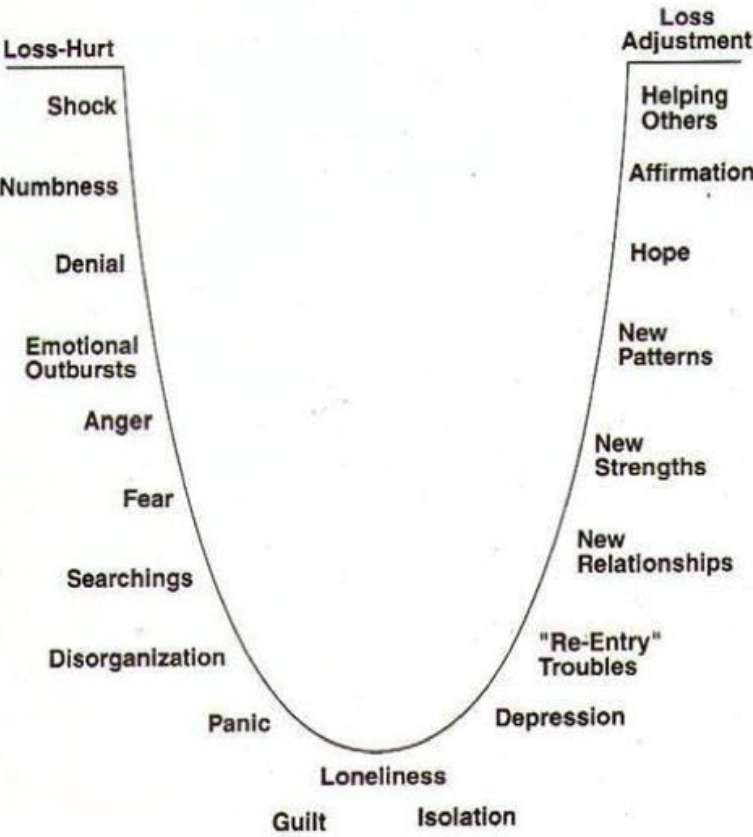
That's how it is in grief. The things, the common place ordinary things, we found comforting in our lives before take on a greater weight. Innocuous things become painful. Evidence of what you've lost is everywhere. Nothing just is what it is anymore.

-Megan Devine

Author: It's OK That You're Not OK



STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience



# Tending To Grief


# Rethinking How We Hold Space for Grief and Loss

– Michele Pearson Clarke




# Carrying Grief

Grief is seen as a kind of malady: a terrifying, messy emotion that needs to be cleaned up and put behind us as soon as possible.” ~ Megan Devine



“Grief expressed out loud for someone we have lost, or a country or home we have lost, is in itself the greatest praise we could ever give them. Grief is praise, because it is the natural way love honors what it misses.” – Martin Prechtel



**Grief cannot be fixed. Grief is carried. Grief is integrated.**

# A Culture of Fixing

Most professional cultures require and reward fixing or solving problems.

Many problems have two needs-that which can be fixed (tangible needs) and that which needs to be held (emotional need)

Holding the emotion requires empathy, empathy requires connection, connection requires being fully present in the moment.

When you are fully present in the moment you are not focused on fixing and it prevents their issue from becoming your burden.

# Exquisite Witness

**Exquisite:** an interaction based in respect, care, honesty, and the ability to truly hear and understand the grieving person's anger and confusion.

**Witness:** the grief journey belongs to the grieving person-it is not yours. "As a witness, we observe more than act, listen more than talk, and follow more than lead. Witnessing celebrates the dignity and authority of the grieving person."

"What distinguishes an exquisite witness is not one's level of training but one's willingness to approach another human being with compassion and deep respect for that person's needs, fear, and grief."

~J. Shep Jeffreys (2011)





# Support in the Moment

Connect

Emotionally

Physically

Validate

“I see that  
you are...”

“That makes  
sense”

Help with  
Grounding

Breathing

Five senses

Movement

# But What Do I Say?

## Starting the Conversation

- You've been on my mind, so I wanted to check in.
- It is so good to see you.
- On a scale of 1-5, how are you feeling?
- What color is your heart today?
- "Grief is different for everyone - what's it like for you?"
- "I didn't know ...tell me about them"
- "What are you missing about them?"

## Validating and Offering Support

- Your feelings are welcome here.
- That sounds really hard.
- I'm so glad you feel that you can share this with me.
- I'm here with you, even if you don't want to talk about it.
- Can we take a deep breath together?
- Is there a specific way I can support you today?

# 11 Tenets of Companionship

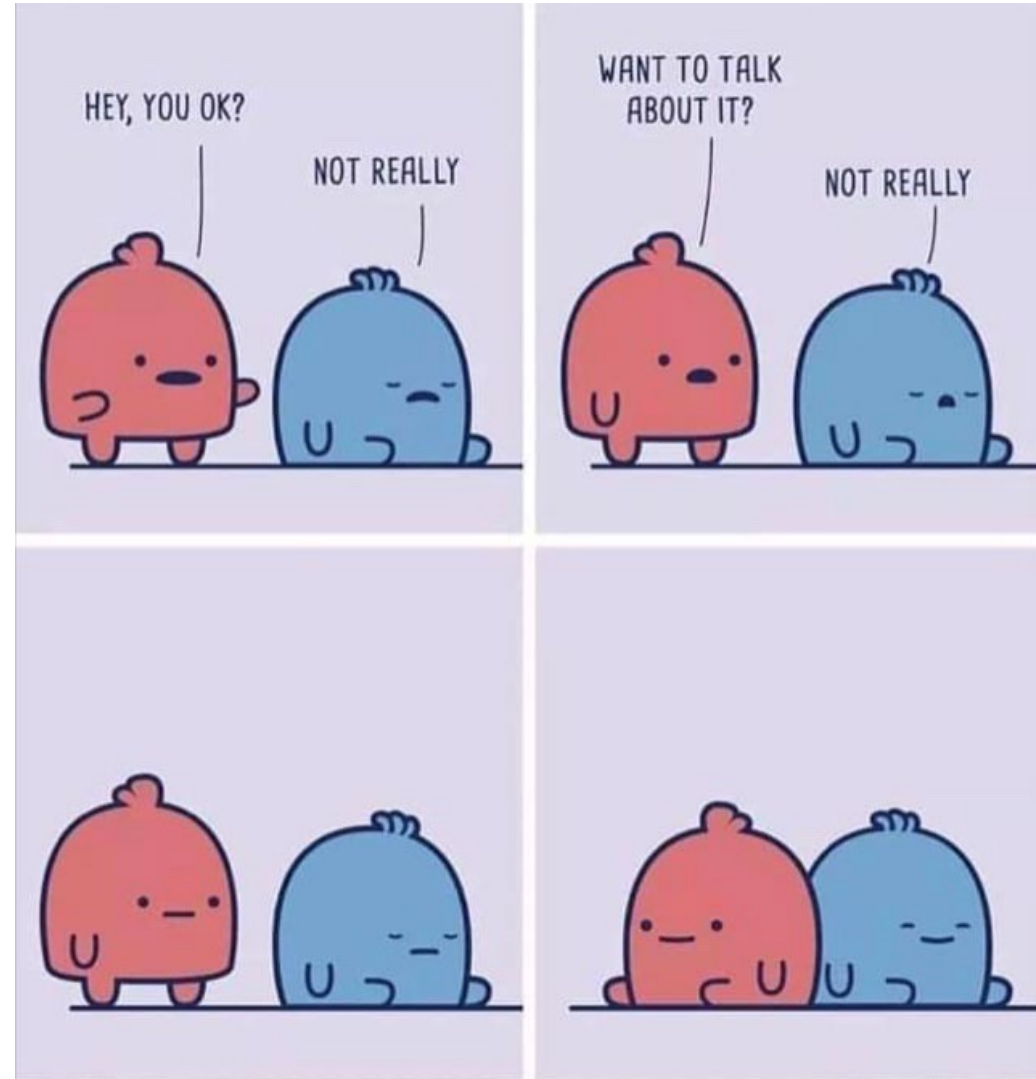
1. Companionship is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
2. Companionship is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being, it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.
3. Companionship is about honoring the spirit; it is not about analyzing with the head.
4. Companionship is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head
5. Companionship is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about judging or directing those struggles.

# 11 Tenets of Companionship

- 6. Companionship is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.
- 7. Companionship is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.
- 8. Companionship is about being still, it is not about frantic movement forward.
- 9. Companionship is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
- 10. Companionship is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.
- 11. Companionship is about compassionate curiosity; it is not about expertise.

# Sitting with the Unfixable

*Remember that  
we can't fix grief,  
as much as we  
want to.*



# A Grief Supportive Workplace





*“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”*

# Making Space

Do you give yourself permission to be impacted by your work?

Do you give your staff permission to be impacted by their work?

What would it take to begin to give that permission or expand what is there?

“Having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness.”

- Kristin Neff



# Patient Loss

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CNAs and HHAs experience many of the same grief symptoms as family caregivers including: missing the deceased, painful memories

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A close, caring relationship is both an important factor in providing quality care AND a risk factor for more intense grief

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Many direct care workers reported feeling unprepared for the death of a patient – emotionally unprepared and lacking concrete information

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Disenfranchised grief: employer and societal underestimations of the closeness of client relationships and extent of the loss

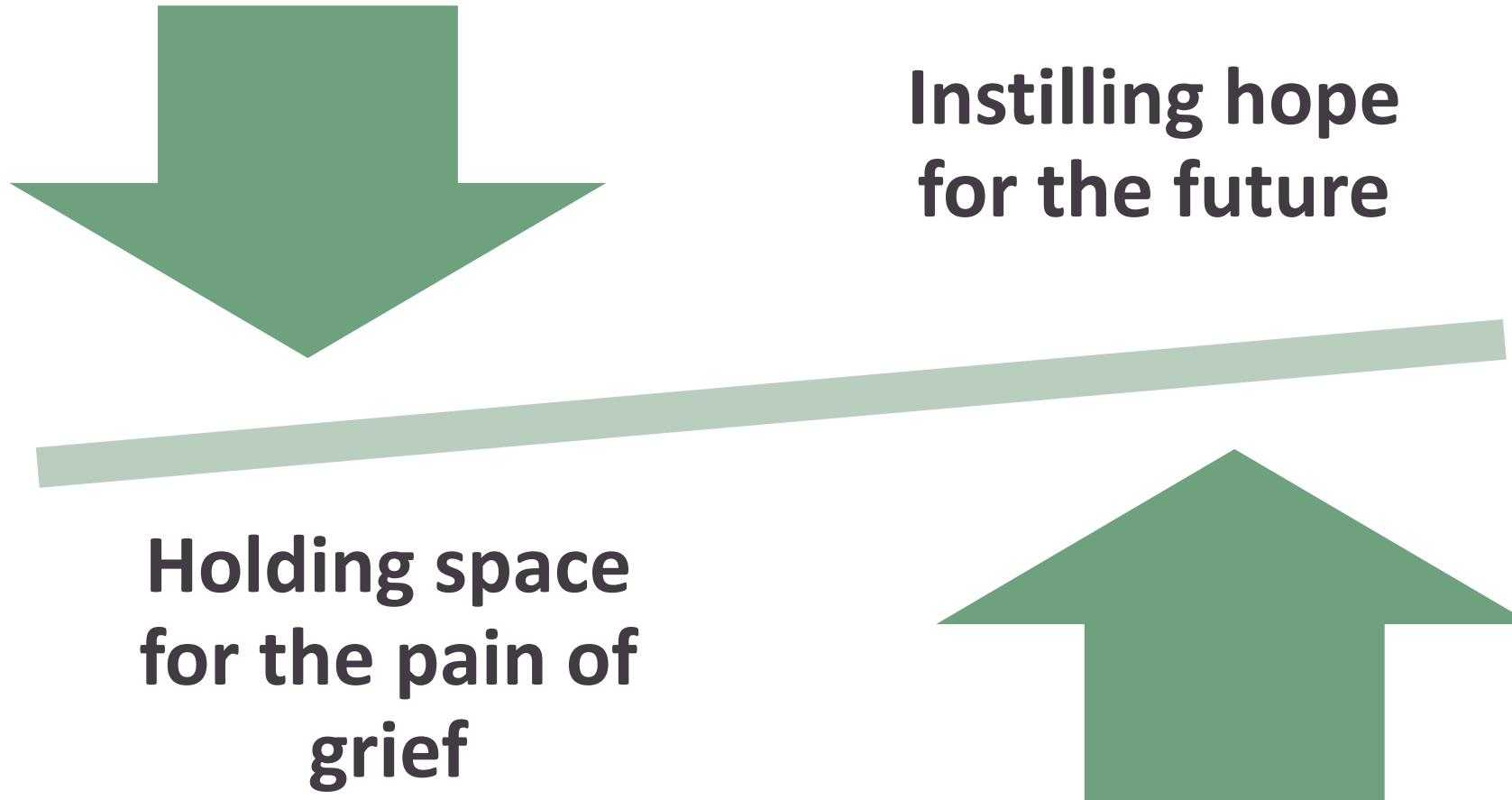
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# You ↔ Staff ↔ Clients

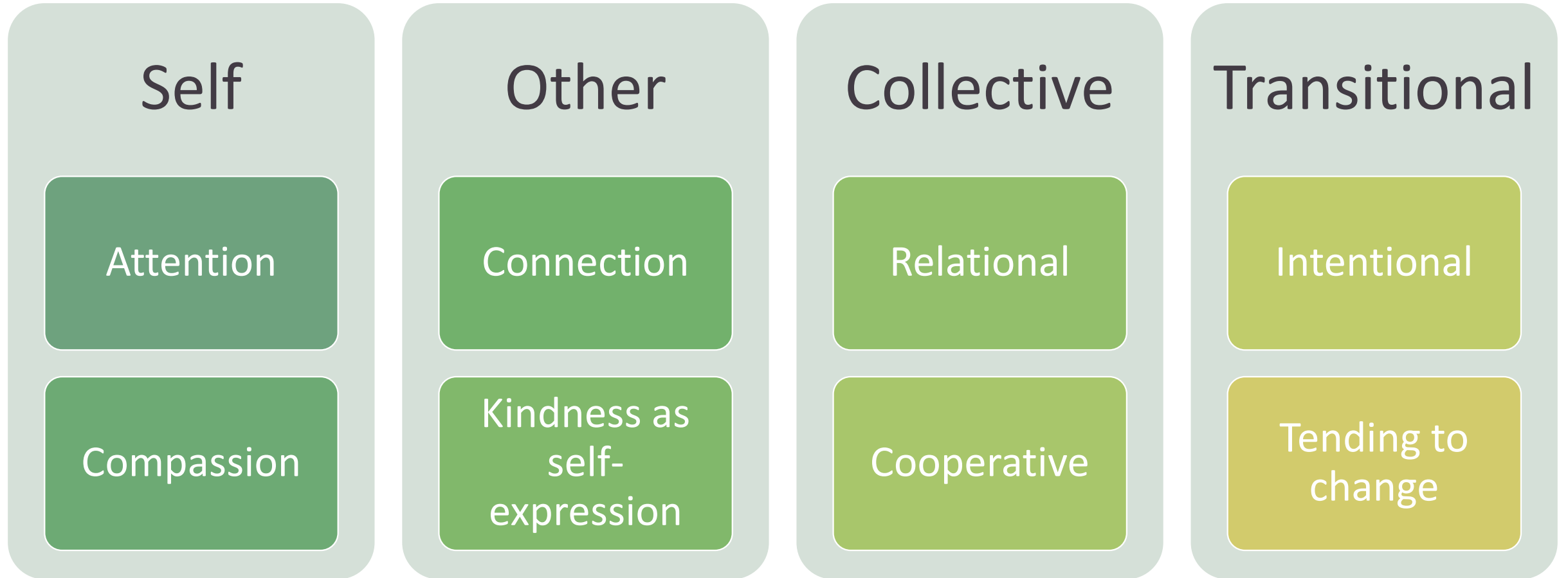


- Collective grief (i.e. COVID)
- Shared Identities
- Personal losses
- Comparison and Minimization

# Leading in Grief



# Dimensions of Care



Rituals support every dimension of care





True care requires time,  
intention, awareness,  
human to human  
connection, presence,  
skill, compassion,  
curiosity, energy and  
experience.

~ Alua Arthur, Going with Grace

A close-up photograph of a white, glossy heart-shaped object, possibly a piece of ceramic or polished stone, resting on a bed of dark, smooth, rounded river stones. The stones are in various shades of dark blue, black, and reddish-brown. The heart is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image, pointing towards the bottom right.

# Encouraging Staff Self-Care

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What and when was the last thing you did to create space for staff to address the impact of the work on self?

What and when was the last thing you did to model self-care?

What are the intentional ways that staff can create space for self-care in their day?



## Collective Care looks like...

- Respect and dignity (relational)
- Seeking and receiving support
- Tending to collective wellness
- Tuning into when we get it right
- Culture of curiosity and openness
- Honor we are human beings, not human doings



# Co-regulation



How do we hold ourselves collectively well?  
Who is holding you up in this work?  
Who is your howl at the moon person?  
When was the last time you used them?

*"We are not the survival of the fittest,  
we are the survival of the nurtured."*

~ Louis Cozolino



# Transitional Care

Listen to a recorded  
meditation or  
breathing exercise.

Stretch your body.

Write it out

Turn up your favorite  
song and sing, dance

Wash your hands  
mindfully.

Strong tastes and  
scents for rising  
anxiety

Start meetings at five  
minutes after the  
hour

Draw/Paint/Create

Change the Scenery

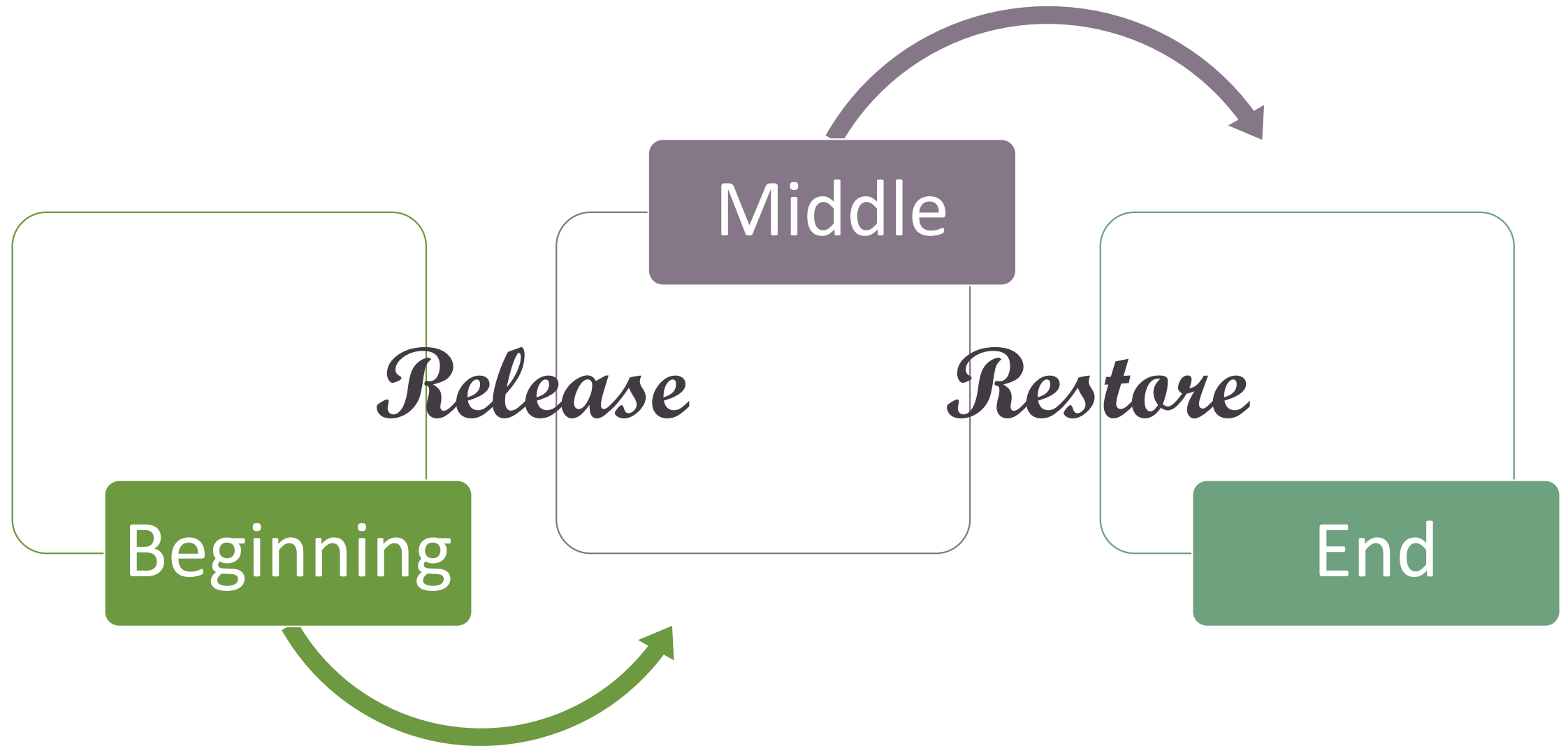
# Rituals & Wellbeing

- Found around the world in all cultures (*animals too!*)
- Series of actions performed according to a prescribed order
- Provide signals to our body and spirit
- Create an anchor for intentional practices
- Increase levels of pro-social states (goodwill, empathy, trust, unity) that can engage and strengthen relationships
- Can be individual or communal
- Acknowledge the life cycle/transitions



This is not about creating rituals and habits to influence external expectations of success, or productivity. This is about nurturing and tending to wellbeing.

# Daily Rituals



# Reclaiming small moments



# Life Cycle Rituals



Your work puts you inside the life cycles and stages of others.

How do you honor that and give yourself the space to acknowledge the impact on yourself?

Ex: How do you mark major life transitions of clients? How do you honor a client who has died?

# Cultivating Resilience

At the end of each day:

## One thing to release

- Courage vs. avoidance
- Identify your internal narratives
- Rituals
- Movement
- Low Impact Debrief

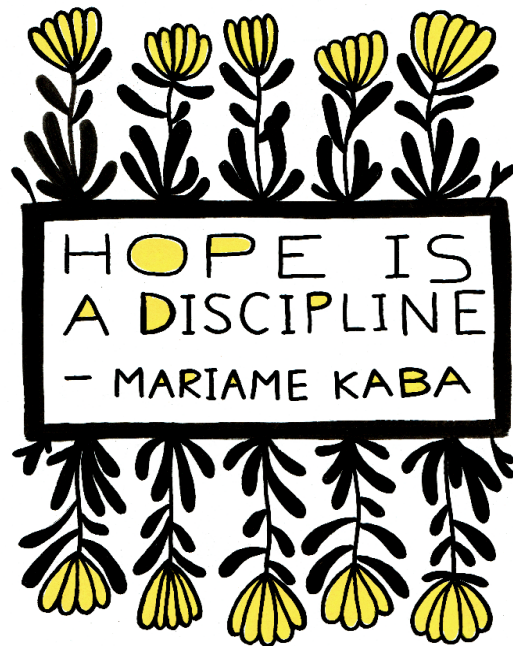
## One way to restore

- Laughing
- Connection
- Rest
- Movement
- Learning
- Unplug



# Cultivating Hope

Hope is a mode of resistance;  
a gift we can cultivate. ~  
Barbara Kingsolver



It's less about "how you feel,"  
and a practice of making a  
decision every day that - you're  
still gonna put one foot in front  
of the other, still gonna get up in  
the morning. It's a hard thing to  
maintain....to believe that it's  
possible to change the world. We  
don't live in a predetermined,  
predestined world where nothing  
we do has impact. No, no, that's  
not true! Change is, in fact,  
constant. ~ Miriam Kaba



# The Miracle of Morning

By Amanda Gorman



# WENDT CENTER FOR LOSS AND HEALING

*Rekindling Hope, Rebuilding Lives*

Let's continue the healing conversation  
@WendtCenter



[www.wendtcenter.org](http://www.wendtcenter.org)

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