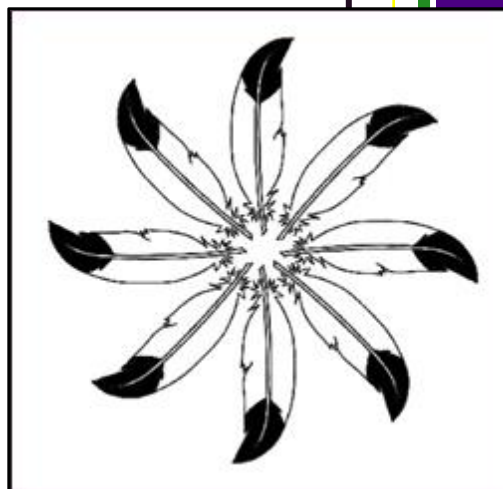


# **Finding Our Way Through: Navigating Loss and Grief in First Nation Life**

## **FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**

**September 2015**



## **Background:**

The “Improving End of Life Care in First Nations Communities” (EOLFN) is a research project funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2010-2015) and conducted by a research team lead by Dr. Mary Lou Kelley and based at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario. The goal of this research is to improve the end-of-life care in First Nations communities by developing community-based palliative care programs and teams. The EOLFN project also respects the concept of “two-eyed seeing,” an approach to cross-cultural collaboration that respects both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (Western medicine) perspectives on illness, health and end-of-life care. Both ways of knowing are viewed as valuable and in the EOLFN project we strive to develop a unique model for providing palliative care that incorporates that best knowledge from both ways of knowing, “best” being determined by the First Nations community members.

The EOLFN project has identified through the research that grief and loss education is essential for health care providers to promote and practice quality palliative care. This workshop can assist care providers in First Nation communities provide healthy, safe, grief and loss support to individuals, families and their loved ones.

## **An Introduction to the Curriculum:**

First Nation individuals, families and communities deal with many challenges related to loss and grief. The Centre for Education and Research on Health & Aging (CERAH) was asked by First Nation partners to provide grief and loss curriculum to support community healing and well-being.

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide an introduction to First Nation loss, grief and grieving to front line care providers who serve First Nation individuals and families. This educational workshop is provided as a support to capacity building at the community and organizational level.

The curriculum was developed to share knowledge on loss and grief and the unique First Nation characteristics. This experiential workshop provides an experience of developing a circle of trust and how to develop safety and trust in a group of people. The group is used as a foundation for learning about sensitive topics such as loss and grief with a group of adult First Nation and non-First Nation participants of varying ages and backgrounds.

## **Grief and Loss Workshop Instructional Notes:**

The workshop is two full days of basic grief and loss education to aid care providers who work with clients who experience loss. The workshop can be applied as a two consecutive day or as two one day workshops.

This workshop is not meant to be a therapeutic session. It is important that facilitators **do not** set up the room with the chairs in a circular shape or as a sharing circle. The room should be set up with smaller tables that seat 2-4 people to allow for a safe intimate sharing experience.

A sample agenda is attached at the end of this document (see Appendix A). It is a sample therefore there is wiggle room for additional information/dynamics and interactions. However, the facilitators should be mindful of amount the information that is being shared and use of time. In addition, there are also icebreakers included which can be used throughout the workshop (see Appendix B). It is important that the facilitators agree on choosing ice breakers that reflect the dynamic of the group. It is essential to be mindful of the size, literacy levels and physical limitations of group members before choosing any ice breakers.

## **Guidelines for Using the Curriculum:**

This workshop is designed for adult care providers who serve First Nation people, not the general public. It is designed to be facilitated by a team of two or three facilitators, one of whom is First Nation and both of whom have a background in helping people with loss, grief and bereavement.

The content will be presented in an organized way by the facilitators, with opportunities for group discussions and exercises throughout the two days. The facilitators will add to the content by the use of stories and personal experience. Sharing of personal stories aids in relating the information in the workshop to the participants.

It is beneficial to have an Elder or cultural resource person added to the facilitation team to assist with prayers, ceremony, cultural teachings and the provision of relevant cultural information from the First Nations territory on which the workshop is being presented.

Loss and grief are sensitive topics for all participants. We all have grief in our past and present and learning about these topics may trigger thoughts, emotions and physical responses. The emotional safety of the participants is a primary concern for the facilitation teams. The workshop has been designed to provide the safest possible environment.

## **Role and Expectations of the Workshop Facilitators/Leaders:**

Facilitators should note that this workshop is not intended to be a therapeutic session or healing circle. This workshop was created to aid health care providers, helpers and family members in providing grief and loss support for community members and their loved ones. Nevertheless, it is important that facilitators recognize that grief and loss education can bring up unresolved feelings for the participants. One of the facilitators should always be available and prepared to leave the workshop to support a participant who is experiencing feelings that they need a private space to process.

It is recommended that there are three facilitators/leaders for this workshop - two facilitators and a cultural resource person. At least one of the facilitators should be a First Nation person with experience in supporting families working through grief, loss and bereavement. One facilitator should be a health care professional (physician, nurse, social worker) with experience in psychosocial palliative care. There should also be a cultural resource person who can bring local and cultural knowledge and add additional capacity for one-on-one support of participants.

The team of two facilitators with a cultural resource person provides an opportunity for a richer workshop experience. The two facilitators would provide the workshop learning experience using a respectful relational team approach, sharing in presentation and facilitation roles organized to make best use of their strengths. This approach allows also for a greater depth of sharing of grief and grieving support experience, wisdom and personal experience. Participant feedback from the previous delivery of this curriculum reported significant benefit in the facilitators sharing stories based on their personal experience with grief, loss and reconciliation

## **Facilitator/s Selection and Preparation:**

It is strongly recommended that this workshop be delivered by a team of two or three facilitators who have experience in clinical palliative care. This team should include at least one registered nurse and a psychosocial care provider such as a social worker. These two facilitators would provide the education almost in a “tag team” format allowing for each to present content based on their strengths. This allows also for a greater depth of sharing of clinical experience, practice wisdom and personal experience. Participants in the piloting of this curriculum reported feeling that there was great benefit in the facilitator sharing stories based on their experiences in palliative care. The role of the third facilitator could be less of a direct facilitator and rather a support person who observes the pace of the delivery of education, mood of the group and is available for one-on-one support should the need arise. The developers of this curriculum recognize that while the goal of this program is an educational one, the subject matter may trigger memories of personal and individual experiences which may

bring up delicate matters such as grief reactions. As this is not an unusual occurrence in palliative care education, it is the role of the third facilitator to be available to provide additional support above and beyond what the other two facilitators are able to provide while delivering group education.

The workshop content is on a sensitive subject; loss, grief and bereavement within a First Nation context. Therefore, the individuals that choose to take on the facilitator role need to be prepared for the triggers embedded in the experience for themselves. Facilitators need to be prepared to do their own work to clear experiences of loss and grief that surface and be able to remain present to the group participants – able to stand emotionally and spiritually present to their experience without moving away or intending to intervene or “fix.”

### **Elders:**

It is also strongly recommended that the community arrange for the support of an Elder or cultural guide from the community to participate in the workshop. Based on local community practices, this individual could offer a blessing for the education, facilitate any traditional practices which the group could utilize, facilitate opening and closing circles and be available to provide support to the participants as needed.

### **Debriefing and Support:**

The facilitators will need available resources for debriefing and other supports in preparation, during and after the workshop, in order to keep their own balance to the extent possible. In addition, identified participants need to be provided support prior to the workshop, during the workshop and following the workshop. The act of registering or creating the intention to attend the workshop may be a trigger for some participants.

### **Follow Up:**

This workshop may trigger past memories and/or a grief response. It is beneficial for the community to have a plan in place for follow up of issues that may arise. This plan should identify connections to mental health practitioners, grief counselors and/or social workers and should be in place before the workshop begins.

## **Confidentiality:**

While confidentiality of participants cannot be ensured in this type of learning session advise participants that confidentiality is important to maintain. Ask them to not disclose personal stories shared by others outside the workshop.

## **Closing Ritual:**

As there is often a great deal of sharing of personal experience that can happen during this workshop, it is recommended that the community designs a supportive closing ritual at the conclusion of the workshop.

## **Curriculum Objectives**

Day 1 objectives are:

1. To provide an opportunity to develop further awareness, knowledge and skills in reflective practice and processing of personal loss, grief and trauma.
2. To develop options for helpful responses drawing on the strengths and capacities of First Nation communities.

The process of dialogue and sharing is supported and facilitated by the team of at least 2-3 facilitators. Each person is an important contributor to the overall process of the workshop and we invite active participation by all participants.

Day 2 objectives are:

1. To provide a culturally relevant and supportive environment for health care providers and others providing family support to explore First Nations loss, grief and bereavement.
2. To further understand the unique characteristics of First Nations loss and grief.
3. To increase capacity to provide care with First Nations individuals, families and communities in their loss, grief, mourning and bereavement work.

# Finding Our Way Through: Navigating Loss and Grief in First Nation Life

## WORKSHOP

### Introductions

- Choose a partner – it is best if it is someone you do not know well
- Introduce yourself to your partner, then switch and have the other person introduce themselves
- As part of the introduction, identify a personal strength you have that has helped you help another person through loss and grief
- Come back after 10 minutes and introduce your partner

### Welcome and Invitation for the Prayer Notes:

Facilitators introduce themselves and other resource people that may be in attendance or assisting (cultural resource people, Elders). Facilitators will let the group know that: “opening and closing with a prayer is part of the workshop and we hope that people will offer a variety of prayers to support our work as a group. We ask that each of you pray in your own way.”

Facilitators describe that the workshop has been developed to provide an introduction to loss, grief and bereavement for front line caregivers working with First Nation people in communities. It includes information and exercises and is meant to be mostly educational although opportunities will be provided for personal reflection and sharing.

### Introduction Notes:

When working in a group it is important to get to know each other. Sharing in pairs and then bringing introductions to a larger group is one way of building strength and understanding in the group.

Facilitators ask that each participant pair up with one another and introduce themselves to each other. In addition, identify a personal strength you have that has helped you help another person through loss and recovery. When the participants come back each will introduce their partner along with the strength that they talked about.

**Discussion in Pairs** - Provide the pairs five minutes for one person and five minutes for the other person.

**Talk** - Beginning with a volunteer pair - provide each participant with an opportunity to introduce their partner and speak to their strength. A talking stick or stone may be used.

### Workshop Objectives: Day 1

1. To provide a culturally relevant and supportive environment for health care providers and others providing family support to explore First Nations loss, grief and bereavement.
2. To provide an opportunity to develop further awareness, knowledge and skills in reflective practice and processing of personal loss, grief and trauma.

### Workshop Objectives Notes:

The facilitator expresses that they are not a therapist and this workshop is not therapy. The hope, however, is that the experience of the workshop will provide a foundation for healing for participants and build capacity for caring for others.

The facilitator acknowledges that thoughts and feelings will arise for participants throughout the workshop experience and that participants are asked to work with these thoughts and feelings, sharing them, writing them in a journal or allowing them to be released as part of the individual's learning.

### Workshop Objectives: Day 2

1. To further understand the unique characteristics of First Nations loss and grief.
2. To develop options for helpful responses drawing on the strengths and capacities of First Nation communities.
3. To increase capacity to provide care with First Nations individuals, families and communities in their loss, grief, mourning and bereavement work.

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### Workshop Content (1/2)

#### Day 1: The Personal Experience of Loss

- Loss, grief, bereavement and mourning
- Unique First Nation context for loss
- Personal process for grief work and self care

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## Workshop Content (2/2)

### Day 2: The Community Experience of Loss

- Cultural values, practices and protocols for loss and grief
- Strengths, challenges and processes in community
- Deeply reflective practice and connection to community

### Workshop Content Notes:

Facilitators lead a discussion on the planned content to see if there are other topics that participants might be interested in or other concerns they may have.

## Workshop Process Overview

- Discussion of the creation of a “circle of trust” including commitment to respect, safety, support and confidentiality
- Roles and responsibilities
- Brief presentations, individual exercises, group circle talks and discussions
- Commitment to the awareness of “triggers” and individual and group responses
- Use of your personal journal to keep track of ideas, insights, thoughts or feelings throughout the workshop that you may want to work with later

### Triggers Notes:

Facilitators lead a discussion about how the workshop, its content and process can all be “triggers” for unfinished loss or grief work for participants and facilitators. Develop a commitment to reflect on our own experience of triggering, share as much as is comfortable and support each other through whatever experience we each may have. Triggers and the experience of triggers are a “teachable” moment and can create an opening to wonderful learning.

## Circle of Trust

- Relationships that are built on trust and respect – not to turn away or try to fix
- Stay present to each other, witness another’s experience while holding back on the urge to fix or offer solutions
- Face our own fears and witness others fear, pain and strength
- Trust that people must find their way or come to life in their own way and time

### Circle of Trust Notes:

Facilitators explain that the circle is a powerful connection between members of a group. It has been used in many societies and in many ways in First Nation cultures. The circle is to be respected for the gift it is and people engaged in a circle need to be invited to share what is comfortable for them to share, pass if they need to and respect each persons shared words by listening without interruption.

## Characteristics of the Circle of Trust

- Unconditional loving presence – a “heart space” not a “head space” – a sacred space to honour the soul and its path
- Trust – confidentiality
- Respect, patience and hope
- Faith in the person’s ability to listen to their own inner voice (soul) and find their way through using their own truth and inner wisdom

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## Safe Space to Invite Inner Guidance

- Inner guidance only emerges into a quiet, safe and inviting space – we need to sit quietly with one another and allow inner wisdom to come out
- Like accompanying a person at end of life
- “The love that exists between two solitudes (people) that protect, border and salute each other” – to be alone together

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## Circle of Trust Development Discussion

- What do you need to feel comfortable and safe in this workshop?
- What other “ground rules” would help to form a strong circle of trust?

### Circle of Trust Development Notes:

Lead a discussion on the development of a “circle of trust” that participants would feel comfortable with during the two days – write the ideas on a flip chart and post them. Lead a follow-up discussion on roles and responsibilities of the facilitator and participants in creating and maintaining a circle of trust.

## Roles and Responsibilities Discussion

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the facilitators?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the participants?

## Roles and Responsibilities Notes:

Facilitators: to begin and end on time to the extent possible; keep the process moving; be clear in presenting material; address questions or concerns as they are raised and be sensitive and responsive to participant needs.

## Loss, Grief and Bereavement

**Loss** – change or loss of something or someone important in your life

**Bereavement** – is a state of being that encompasses grief and mourning

**Grief** – is a total human experience and a natural response to the loss of someone or something precious

**Mourning** – the sharing of grief with other humans, family and community who may include gatherings, ritual or ceremony to mark the loss

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## Grieving

- Grieving is a process that takes time.
- The process depends on the nature of the loss and the person and their situation.
- It may take many months or years after a death to fully resolve.
- Grieving may become complicated and depends on the person and their situation.

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### Physical / Body (1/4)

- Hallowness in stomach
- Tightness in chest
- Heart palpitations
- Cannot sleep
- Diarrhea, no appetite for food
- Tiredness
- Taking on symptoms from the deceased

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### Emotional / Heart (2/4)

- Anxiety (free floating fear not about anything specific)
- Depressed mood
- Numbness
- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger
- Guilt
- Relief
- Apathy – not caring about anything

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### Mental / Mind (3/4)

- Disbelief – experience does not seem real
- Confusion - foggy mind or forgetfulness
- Cannot concentrate or pay attention to anything for more than a few minutes

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### Spiritual /Spirit (4/4)

- Anger or questioning God or other religious or spiritual beliefs
- Taking another look at personal faith
- Searching for meaning of the loss

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### The Experience of Grief Discussion

- What are some of the experiences you have had with grief?
- How did you feel it – mind, body, spirit, heart?

### **The Experience of Grief Notes:**

Facilitators lead a discussion about the experience of grief that participants have had themselves or witnessed with others.

## Phases of Grief – Loss of a Loved One

- No set phases or stages or steps – progress not in a line, more a spiral
- May differ depending on cultural, religious, spiritual or family background
- Uncomplicated grief related to a death may include:
  - Anticipatory grief (before the death)
  - Acute grief (weeks to months) which may include shock and numbness
  - Anger, bargaining etc.
  - Chronic phase (months to years)
  - Reconciliation

## Phases of Grief Notes:

**\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.**

**Anticipatory Grief** - When it becomes clear that the death is going to happen, individuals and families may begin their grieving. This may include having some of the mind, body, heart and spirit related symptoms as presented.

**Acute Grief** - The immediate reaction to a death is different for people coming from different cultural backgrounds and religious or spiritual

traditions. Each individual and family is also unique. Grief may begin within minutes or hours after death although delayed grief is not unusual. Grief may be expressed outwardly or remain silent.

**Chronic Phase** (not experienced by everyone) - May last for a few months but up to a few years – the person may stop seeing people, and become sad and depressed. The person may lack direction in their lives, be disorganized and lack a sense of purpose. They may experience yearning or searching for the lost loved one. The person may need “permission” to stop grieving.

**Reconciliation Phase** - The person is able to reorganize their thinking and their lives. The daily experience of grief becomes less. Memories can be recalled without sadness and new relationships can be formed without guilt. In many cases grief is never resolved or finished; it changes and becomes less acutely painful.

**Expected and Unexpected Death in Palliative Care** - In an expected death there is more opportunity to engage in anticipatory grief during a palliative care period prior to death. Support needs to be able to be provided over a longer period of time prior to death as the family and community walk with the dying person. In the case of sudden, unexpected or particularly traumatic death (death as a result of violence or suicide, for example) the grieving experience can be very acute and there is increased risk of complicated or chronic grief.

## Individual, Family and Community Connections

- Each individual has their own experience of grief and will work through the process coming to resolution in their own unique way.
- As families connect, each individual has their own experience and will be at their own place in the process – it may not match up.
- As communities connect, again the unique set of experiences of each individual and within families need to be understood at the community level.

## Individual, Family and Community Notes:

Facilitators lead a discussion of participant's experience of connections between individual, family and community experience of grief

## First Nation Loss, Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

- Community, family and cultural strengths
- Historical loss and trauma – colonization; loss of land, language and culture; residential school and child apprehensions
- Today's reality – many losses within extended families; high death rate; early, unexpected and traumatic or violent death and a backlog of unresolved grief
- Gender roles and the way men and women approach grief
- Spirituality and religion

## First Nation Loss, Grief, Bereavement and Mourning Notes:

***\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

### **Community, family and cultural strengths:**

Each family and community has its own strengths – some grounded in culture, values or relationships with the land and each other.

### **Historical loss and trauma:**

Since first contact with outsiders, First Nation people have experienced colonization; loss of

land, language and culture; residential school and child apprehensions. This context of historical loss creates the backdrop, at different levels and with differing impact of how First Nation people experience loss now. The impact on cultural and personal identity, healthy family and parenting relationships, self-esteem and connection to historical practices and protocols all make grieving more challenging.

### **Today's reality:**

The reality of many First Nation communities is that there are many losses within extended families that have wide ranging impacts throughout the family and community. There are high death rates, more early, unexpected and traumatic or violent death. This may result in one loss stacked on another, without the time between to complete any one grieving process, which leads to a backlog of grief.

### **Gender roles and way men and women approach grief:**

There are cultural gender roles and communication patterns in most First Nation communities that make a difference in how grief is managed. In addition, men are raised from boyhood with the idea that they should not openly express pain and grief. Men are more likely to isolate themselves in their unexpressed pain and try to address the pain through methods such as drug and alcohol use, gambling or other addictions.

### **Spirituality, religion and mourning:**

People have a variety of spiritual and or religious beliefs, often including conflicting beliefs held by individuals and not all the same beliefs within families. These beliefs can be a great source of comfort as well as the source of confusion and conflict in some situations. Public sharing of grief is mourning and there are many cultural and spiritual or religious ways of marking loss through gatherings, ceremony or ritual.

### Small Group Discussion

- Form small groups (4 or 5 per group) and share your personal experience of loss, grief and bereavement in family lives and working with others
- Engage in a discussion on the personal experiences and insights (45 minutes)
- Bring back highlights to the larger group

### Group Discussion Notes:

After the groups have met for 45 minutes, debrief by beginning with a volunteer - provide each member with an opportunity to share their thoughts on the information presented so far and the experience in sharing with the small group.

### Self-awareness and the Process of Living

- We each have a unique process through which we grow, heal and live
- It is always moving and unfolding
- Living our process is the way we work through the pain of loss and grief
- "Living in process" is about allowing our experience to surface and expressing it as we heal and relearn wholeness
- Connection to "the universal" or spirituality is the source of energy for a successful process
- We each have a role in allowing our own process and contribute to others around us

### Living in the Process of our Lives Notes:

Facilitators engage the participants in a discussion about how the experience of their lives is a process. For example - teaching and learning is an ongoing process or the way we come together and build our relationship as a group is a process.

### Four Aspects of Energy

- We have mind, body, spirit and heart
- All four aspects need to work together and keep moving in order for life to carry on
- Sometimes in our grieving process we get "stuck" in one or more of these aspects and may need help to move along and get back in the "flow" of life and co-creation

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## Insights and Intentions

- Our insights – what we see in ourselves help us to know if we are moving or not and what we need in the way of support
- Our intention guides the process and sometimes reality does not live up to what we intend

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## What People Experiencing Grief May Need

- To be accepted and not judged
- Allowed to express their acute grief in the way that best suits them, their individual beliefs and their cultural, religious or spiritual traditions
- Support from friends and family – may need different types and levels to move through grief and adjust to the loss
- Time
- Information on normal and complicated grief
- Physical needs taken care of – food, water, sleep, exercise
- Support for decision making as independently as possible
- Sometimes additional grief counselling – talking about the loss, to express feelings, and monitoring for complicated grief

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## Complicated Grief

- Grief reactions that significantly affect the ability to function in your personal and work world for a prolonged period of time
- May involve problems such as severe anxiety or depression, intrusive and persistent thoughts, painful yearnings, excessive feelings of being alone and empty, avoiding tasks and reminders of the lost loved one, sleep problems
- Professional help is needed

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## Processing Grief

- Knowing when we have grief work to do
- Finding an effective process or set of processes
- Assessing progress
- Methods – mainstream and cultural
- Complicated grief
- Additional supports

## Processing Grief Notes:

***\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

### **Knowing when we have grief work to do:**

When we have a significant loss, it is important to find time to reflect on the loss and “listen to yourself” – allow yourself to feel all of your feelings. Understand that this most recent loss may be a trigger that may show you your “backlog of grief.” If you are sad, crying sometimes without warning, withdrawing from people and activities that you enjoy, changing

the way you eat, sleep or use of addictive substances or experiences; you may have grieving work to do.

### **Finding an effective process or set of processes:**

Think about what has worked for you in the past, talk to people, try things out – journaling, meditating, prayer, connection with nature, ceremony, books, web sites, support groups etc.

### **Assessing progress:**

Review how it is going and if your process is stuck or you seem to be getting worse or not improving, you may need to seek additional help.

### **Methods – mainstream and cultural:**

Know yourself and the people around you and use what feels most comfortable and helpful. Do not hesitate to experiment with new things that feel safe and seem promising. A mainstream method might be seeing a counsellor or attending a support group. Cultural methods may include meeting with an Elder for teachings or support or attending a ceremony.

### **Complicated grief:**

Watch for signs of complicated grief such as those reviewed in slide 23 and get help if needed.

### **Additional supports:**

Look for people in your community that can be called on as additional supports – friends; family; community members; First Nation health and social staff; resident, telephone or visiting counsellors; hospice organizations; workshops; religious clergy; cultural helpers or ceremonialists.

### Understanding Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones (1/2)

- Open to the presence of your loss
- Dispel misconceptions about grief
- Embrace the uniqueness of your grief
- Explore your feelings of loss
- Recognize that you are not crazy

### Ten Essential Touchstones of Grief Notes:

**\* *This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

The ten touchstones of grief provide good advice for ourselves and for those we support:

#### **Open to the presence of your loss:**

We cannot go around our grief – the only way is through the heart of it by acknowledging the pain and honouring it. With it comes your intention to heal.

### Understanding Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones (2/2)

- Understand the needs of mourning
- Nurture self
- Reach out for help
- Seek recognition, not resolution
- Appreciate your transformation

#### **Dispel misconceptions about grief:**

Grief and mourning are not the same thing. Grief is the internal thoughts and feelings we have when we experience loss. Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside of yourself – often with other people. Grief and mourning do not progress in predictable ways. You need to move toward grief not away from it. Tears are often a necessary expression of grief and mourning. Open mourning is not connected with being “weak in your faith.” When we lose a loved one, we miss not only the physical presence of the

person but many other connections to yourself and the work around you. You have permission to think of the person on special days like birthdays. The goal is not to disconnect and “get over” grief – it is to find new connections. Others can help and the grief may continue to come up at times for many months or years to come.

#### **Embrace the uniqueness of your grief:**

The wilderness of your grief is yours and is a creation of your unique self, the unique loss and the circumstances of your life. Differences may include: our relationship to the person who died or was affected by the loss; the circumstances of the death or loss; the ritual or funeral experience; the people in your life; your unique personality; the unique personality of the one who died or was affected by the loss; your gender; your cultural background; your religious or spiritual background; other crisis or stress in your life right now; your experiences with loss or death in the past; your physical health, and other things.

#### **Explore your feelings of loss:**

Feel your feelings – explore the many and varied feelings of loss. As strange as some of the emotions might seem – such as numbness, relief or confusion, they are a true expression of where you are right now.

**Recognize that you are not crazy:**

Feelings of grief related to loss involve normal human experiences. you are worried about developing a mental illness, seek help in assessing your experience to ease your mind or get additional help.

**Understand the needs of mourning:**

The six needs of mourning a death are to accept the reality of the death; let yourself feel the pain of the loss; remember the person who died; develop a new self-identity; search for meaning and let others help you – now and always.

**Nurture yourself:**

The word “bereaved” means to be “torn apart” or to have special needs. Compassion means “with passion.” Caring for and about yourself with passion is self-compassion. Take care of yourself and let others take care of you – mind, body, spirit and heart as well as social connection.

**The Mourner’s code – ten self-compassion principles:**

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief
2. You have the right to talk about your grief
3. You have the right to feel a lot of different emotions
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits
5. You have the right to experience “grief bursts” or short intense experiences of emotion
6. You have the right to make use of ritual
7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality
8. You have the right to search for meaning
9. You have the right to treasure your memories
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal – be patient and tolerant with yourself.

**Reach out for help:**

Healing requires the support and understanding of those around you. Different people will take on various roles – some more able to “show up” than others. Be open to new and changing relationships.

**Seek reconciliation, not resolution:**

Your journey may never truly end – it will change and become less painful. Reconciliation is moving into a new reality with a new sense of energy and confidence – to be able to fully acknowledge the loss and also become involved again in the activities of living. You reach it through intentional mourning; by talking it out; writing it out; crying it out; thinking it out; playing it out; painting (or drawing etc.) it out; dancing or walking it out etc.

**Appreciate your transformation:**

The journey through grief is life changing – you are not the same person you were.

### Journal Exercise

- Think about your own grieving processes
- Write down what worked and what did not work
- Reflect on what you do that works for self-care
- Put a star beside those ideas you would like to share

### Grief Exercise

- Grief – what are some of the thoughts and feelings that surfaced?
- Stuck – what is your experience of being stuck or sidelined?
- Me- what kinds of people are in your circle – family? friends? strangers?
- Love – how is love shared in your life and others?

### Facilitators will present the participants with a journaling exercise:

Journaling is an effective method for self-reflection. It is also useful in supporting the process of surfacing thoughts and feelings which is important in learning and working through loss. The exercise will help participants connect with the learning of the day and provide experience with journaling.

### Discussion Notes:

Have a discussion on sharing methods that work for processing loss and closing comments for the day. Beginning with a volunteer - provide each member with an opportunity to share their thoughts that came up in the journaling exercise and any closing comments for the day.

### Grief Mapping Overnight Exercise

***\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

- Draw one circle with “**Grief**” at the center of it and connect feelings, thoughts, and behaviours to that experience.
- Draw a second circle with the word “**Stuck**” in the middle and connect all of the ways in which our natural grieving process can become stuck or sidetracked.
- Draw a third circle with “**Me**” in the center and connect the circle to names of people who you have shared grief with.
- Draw a forth circle with “**Love**” in the center and connect all of the things you do to express love or compassion for yourself and others around you in time of loss.

### CLOSING PRAYER

## Day 2 – Reflections

- How are you doing this morning?
- Share one significant learning or new awareness from yesterday.
- Tell us about your experience of the “circle of trust.”
- Anything you want changed or added for today?

## Facilitator Welcome and Invitation for the Prayer:

Facilitator(s) introduces self and other resource people that may be in attendance or assisting (co-facilitators, cultural resource people, Elders and others).

Facilitator(s) will let the group know that: “opening and closing with a prayer is part of the workshop and we hope that people will offer a variety of prayers to support our work as a group. We ask that each of you pray in your own way.”

## Grief Mapping Exercise Debriefing

- Grief – what are some of the thoughts and feelings that surfaced?
- Stuck – what is your experience of being stuck or sidelined?
- Me – what kinds of people are in your circle – family? friends? strangers?
- Love – how is love shared in your life- for self and others?

## Grief Mapping Exercise Debriefing Notes:

Option 1 - Ask a few group members that are willing to share their mapping exercises done overnight with the group.

Option 2 – Ask the group to break into pairs and share their mapping exercise results with each other. Closing of the exercise ask “In what ways does the process of grieving get stuck and how do you know it is stuck? (Prompts – anger, blame, depression, self-destructive behaviour, disconnection, isolation etc.) And how can acts of love and kindness help?”

### Cultural Values (1/2)

- Old and new life ways
- Similarities and differences
- Respect
- Sharing and caring
- Spirituality
- Connection with the land

### Cultural Values (2/2)

- Interconnectedness
- Harmony and balance
- Extended family
- Collective
- Gender specific roles and responsibilities
- Gratitude

### Introduction to Cultural Values, Practices and Protocols Notes:

***\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

Cultural values, practices and protocols differ between people, between families, between communities and across Canada. Values help to guide us on the path of life – in real life our behaviour does not always live up to our values. The values presented here are presented as an example of the kind of values often found in some form in First Nation communities. The practices and protocols are presented as categories of the kind of practices and protocols sometimes found in communities and the local sources of cultural information – Elders, resource people and participants will offer information on what is common in the area in which the workshop takes place.

#### **Old and New Lifeways:**

Throughout Canada, First Nation people blend the old and new in their lifestyles. Cultural practices and approaches to food gathering, seasonal activities, health and healing co-exist along-side more modern lifestyles, often within the same person or family.

#### **Similarities and Differences:**

Grief and Loss are part of every human life and many of the experiences we share. Each individual and family has a unique set of values that guide their everyday life and therefore, it is important that no assumptions are made about how individuals use or rely on common First Nation values in their lives. Each person and family needs to be assessed and understood as individuals within a relational context.

#### **Common First Nation Values:**

Some values often associated with old and new First Nation culture and community life include:

#### **Respect:**

In a time honoured First Nation sense of respect, it is about holding other people, animals, plants and other offerings of Mother Earth as sacred gifts from Creator. Respect demonstrates a deeply felt gratitude and compassion for natural things that a person comes into contact with. Elders of the community are held in high regard and respect for the experience in life they have gained. They are honoured. As a result, the relative age of individuals in communication makes a difference in how respect operates – a person is expected to defer to, and respect, someone

older than they are. Respect for the person who may be dying or directly experiencing loss as well as the choices people make in moving through grief and bereavement is fundamental to a First Nation approach to support.

### **Sharing and Caring:**

Fundamental to the success of a collective society is the concept of sharing what you have and making contributions to the well-being of other members of the group. First Nation communities have always shared among the extended family and community with generosity and no expectation of reciprocity. The food, clothing and other wealth was freely shared. The caring was demonstrated in many ways including the love expressed for all members of the extended family and community. The caring flows out of a concern for all and is the basis for the sharing. Caring for each other and sharing the experience of loss between individuals and within families and communities is fundamental to experiencing helpful support to ease the suffering.

### **Spirituality:**

Spirituality was, and for some First Nation people remains, a very practical and fundamental part of daily living. The connection to spiritual support is provided by direct dialogue with Creator, Great Spirit, God or other helpers such as animals, birds or spirit helpers which may take the form of ancestors. Gratitude is expressed for the gifts of the day and guidance sought about the tasks of the day. Many people have become involved with organized religions and others have maintained beliefs more consistent with community history. Some have found a comfortable way of integrating the two. A person “who believes in nothing” is someone to be pitied in traditional First Nation thinking because they are seen as turning their backs on the extraordinary support and guidance offered through the practice of spirituality. Making meaning of an experience of loss often involves connection to “all that is universal” in line with personal spiritual or religious beliefs.

### **Connection with the Land:**

Land is seen as a gift from the Creator and sacred place for connecting with our own humanity. It is “on loan” to human beings and we are expected to take good care of it for future generations. This is a concept of the responsibility for stewardship of the land. People live out their spirituality through “living a good life as a good person in a good way.” This includes time on the land and the expression of respect and spiritual connection to the land in daily activities. The land can be a wonderful healer and nature can contribute to our sense of connection to the larger world; all of which can be helpful in grieving loss.

### **Interconnectedness:**

All things of the earth including plants, animals and other inanimate natural parts of the earth are seen as connected. It is thought that the true nature of our existence can only be seen through understanding connections. This is in direct contrast to scientific theory and contemporary techniques for analysis that stresses “breaking things down.” Frameworks for understanding connections that are used include the four directions, four aspects of self or medicine wheel and the elements (earth, water, sky/air, and fire). The ripple effects of grief affect a large circle of extended family and community and disrupt our connections to our human family and the natural world. Healing is often seen as the restoring of connection in the interconnectedness of all things.

**Harmony and Balance:**

Harmony and balance are highly-valued as conflict is seen as a threat to the survival and well-being of the community. Conflict or illness is seen as the result of imbalance within the person, family, clan or community. In order to restore harmony, balance must be restored. Traditional medicine practices and other spiritual and faith based help are often directed toward the restoration of balance. Loss disrupts harmony and balance and needs to be restored through the grieving and mourning experience.

**Extended Family:**

The extended family is a basic unit of social organization and extends far beyond the limits of the nuclear family. Membership in the family has rights associated with it in terms of asking for help or support and also has responsibilities in being expected to fulfill your duty to help others within the family if you are in a position to do so. As families are large and connected throughout the community, the ripple effect of loss is far reaching but so is the strength pulled from large extended families in challenging times. In some communities, children are limited in their contact with the bereaved or protected in specific ways due to fear of how the soul of the departed may affect the child.

**Collective:**

Indigenous people have always lived in collective society and traditionally, the survival and interests of the whole society were held above the interests of the individual members. Within the collective, every person has their place and their contribution to make. All contributions are seen as valuable and as good as the contributions made by others. Decisions were made on consensus and competitiveness between members of the group was seen as potentially harmful to group cohesion. Loss and grief are not seen as only individual experiences – the burden is shared among the collective and the collective is disrupted by a death, for example.

**Gender Specific Roles and Responsibilities:**

Historically, the extended family and clan had very important responsibilities in raising girls to be women and boys to be men. Specific aunts or uncles as directed by the Elders played important roles within some linguistic groups. The “coming of age” was marked by ceremony and was very important to the whole community. Many tasks were gender specific although women also trapped and hunted, often for smaller game. In community responses to grief and bereavement, there are often specific roles for men and women to play.

**Gratitude:**

The expression of gratitude for all that is offered by mother earth every day is seen as a fundamental requirement for ongoing abundance. If there is no gratitude, there will be no food. Gratitude is connected to respect and together they ensure relationships between people and the natural world are not disrupted. Gratitude for the love and support often expressed between people in times of loss and the new ways of seeing our lives following our active mourning period may be features of the Aboriginal loss experience.

## Cultural Practices and Protocols

- Communication, gender and relationships
- Expected behaviour
- Community visits and family events
- Cultural laws and practices

## Cultural Practices and Protocols Notes:

***\* This is also included as a handout for participants at the end of the facilitator guide.***

Each Nation also has cultural practices and protocols that may differ between communities, between families and between individuals. Understanding the protocols or practices may be helpful to yourself and those you may seek to support through loss and grieving. Participating in ceremony, ritual, religious services or sacraments and other practices may be very comforting to individuals and families.

Protocols are the way in which “things are done” and therefore, have “dos” and “don’ts” attached.

It is important to understand the protocols that are active in a specific family or community and respect them in providing support.

Some areas of relationship in which protocols may be active are:

### Communication, Gender and Relationships:

- Communication – for example, is there a difference in communicating with a person of the opposite gender (men and women) or communicating with a child or an Elder including “do not interrupt” rules
- Relationships – how to develop relationships and specific guidelines on developing relationships with cultural helpers or Elders; how to use physical contact in relationship development
- Gender Roles and Responsibilities – respect between men and women and honouring of physical objects that are owned by a person of the opposite gender
- Matriarchal and patriarchal roles and head of house protocols
- Confrontation or Conflict – how to deal with confrontation or conflict in the community – for example use of a third party helper or person working between the two people in conflict

Protocols in this area may affect the quality of communication, conflict resolution and relationship building throughout the palliative care and grieving process.

### Expected Behaviour:

- Dress and behaviour code – appropriate dress for community service provision, meetings and special events; public use of alcohol
- Regalia, Drums and Sacred Items – protocols on respect of regalia, drums and other sacred objects including how to talk about these items and “don’t touch” rules

First Nations may have rules for how people are expected to dress or behave around the dying, the grieving family or at mourning related community events.

### **Community and Family Events:**

- Home visiting – any protocols that need to be respected in home visiting
- Death or Loss – protocols on community preparation and response to death or other loss and later in the mourning process
- Funeral traditions – when funerals or other ceremony are used to mark community life and how a newcomer or community member might participate – for example, do they have to wait for a formal invitation to attend

Each family or community may have rules around who will visit to dying person's home or the home of the bereaved. The way in which families respond to loss and grief and the ways in which these events are marked by traditions and ceremonies are important to understand.

### **Cultural Laws and Practices:**

- Cultural laws – what are the cultural laws that need to be understood
- Cultural health and healing – how do traditional health and healing practices operate in the community and how might a resource worker refer a person to individuals offering cultural health and healing assistance
- Protocols on how to approach Elders for advice or teachings, how to access traditional or cultural knowledge

The roles played by Elders, spiritual or religious leaders and cultural people in the palliative care and grieving processes are also important to understand and support. Cultural laws may be in force about how cultural knowledge is accessed and used; how the community relates to the bereaved families and how individuals play roles in support of the funeral and grieving process. For example, there may be individuals assigned to sit with the family or the body of the deceased, prepare the body for burial, offer prayers or songs etc. These roles may be based in religious or spiritual traditions or beliefs.

#### Discussion on Cultural Values, Practices and Protocols

- How do these or other values, practices and protocols take on life in your family or community?
- How does culture help at times of loss?

#### **Discussion on Cultural Values, Practices and Protocols Notes:**

Facilitate a discussion on how these or other values, practices and protocols take on life in your family or community? AND how does culture help at times of loss?

## Questions for the Group

1. What is our experience as First Nation families, workplaces or community with loss and grief?
2. What are some of the strengths and “life giving forces” that we have to work with in building a healthier way to work through loss?
3. What are some of the challenges that we face in this area of loss and grief?
4. What is missing in our support systems for grieving, bereavement and mourning?
5. What ideas do we have on how things could be better in the future?

## Cultural Competence

- Cultural Competence is the **human relational capacity to seek and find compassionate understanding within, between and among people of differing cultural backgrounds and perspectives.**  
(Hanson, 2009)

### Small Group Discussion:

Participate in a small group discussion (4 or 5 per group) on the experience of loss, grief and bereavement in First Nation families, groups (like the workplace), and communities.

### Small Group Report Back:

One person reports back to the larger group on the discussions each group had.

### Large Group Discussion:

The large group talks about the ideas raised by the smaller groups and identifies some of the common themes and suggested actions.

### Cultural Competence Notes:

Cultural competence is needed between First Nation people as they may have differing cultural background and perspectives (ways of looking at things) even though part of the same nation, community or family. For example, one sister or brother who stays in the community for life and another that moves away for advanced education, marries outside and comes back with a family that knows city life.

The expression of cultural competence requires action – connecting thoughts and feelings to behaviour. The concept describes how behaviours are grounded in a person’s thoughts, judgments, feelings, awareness, knowledge, skills and style in relationships. In order to be culturally competent, we need to be self-aware.

### Levels of Cultural Competence

- Inside one person
- Between two people
- Team
- Organization or system

### Deeply Reflective Practice and Building Relationships

- Learn to listen to yourself and learn from your experience
- Focus on building quality, caring relationships through self-awareness and reaching out
- Each person is respected and the “circle of trust” is developed
- Find ways to look at own issues and how they are reflected in your relationship with self and others – mind, body, heart spirit
- Make time to think and feel deeply in reflecting on your experience
- Develop ways of building support and finding “honest mirrors” or people who care about us and are willing to provide feedback and debriefing support

### Deeply Reflective Practice & Building Relationships Notes:

In working with others, we need to be able to connect with where we are in our process and what we need to do next to invest in relationships. Individuals experiencing loss and grief need compassionate understanding and people willing to “walk with them through it.” No one can take on the pain or burden from another, but we can be a loving witness.

### Discussion on Experiences With Helping Others

- How have I helped others through loss or seen others provide help?
- What works and does not work?
- What kinds of support do I want for me and my family at the time of loss and grief?

### Discussion on Experiences with Helping Others Notes:

Facilitate a discussion on the questions on the slide.

### Companioning (1/2)

Companioning is:

- a life-giving, hope-filled model that incorporates the mind and body as well as the soul and spirit
- a companion – “to accompany, to associate, to comfort, to be familiar with”
- sees death and grieving as a spiritual journey of the heart and soul
- assumes a continued relationship of memory beyond death
- seeks reconciliation not “recovery”
- rather than “taking away” normal symptoms it seeks to “watch out for”, to “keep and honor”, to “bear witness”

### Companioning Notes

Companioning is different from “treating.” The helper is encouraged to adopt a “teach me” attitude about grief where the person with the experience is leading.

## Companioning (2/2)

Companioning understands that:

- mourning needs to occur in doses- at a pace their heads and hearts can manage
- the principles are:
  - “no rewards for speed”;
  - “not attached to outcome” – there is no destination
  - “divine momentum” – allow the process to flow as it is meant to - the process, all by itself, will lead to healing and reconciliation – trust it
- open-heartedness is reflected in humility; unknowing; unconditional love; and “readiness to receive” a fellow human being

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## Tenants of Companioning the Bereaved (1/2)

Companioning is about:

- being present to another person’s pain; it is not about taking it away
- going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not thinking you are responsible for finding the way out
- honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect
- listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head
- bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about judging or directing these struggles

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## Tenants of Companioning the Bereaved (2/2)

Companioning is about:

- walking alongside; it is not about leading or being led
- discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it does not mean filling every moment up with words
- being still; it not about frantic movement forward
- respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic
- learning from others; it is not about teaching them
- curiosity; not about expertise

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## Reconciliation

- To be bereaved is to be “torn apart” – reconciliation is about reconciling with a “new normal”
- Maslow’s order – physical needs (shelter, food, water, sleep); safety; love and belonging; esteem and self-actualization; transcendence.
- Reconstruction and reintegration begins at the ground with physical needs and moves up as time goes on; more in a spiral that moves around revisiting similar places and experiences than in a line with “no going back”

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## Self Care and Next Steps Discussion

- What do you plan to do for yourself to follow-up from the workshop?
- What support people or systems do you have in place to help?
- What new supports might you seek to build capacity for yourself and helping others?
- What do you see as next steps in self care and self compassion?

### Self-Care and Next Steps Notes:

Facilitators lead a discussion and focus on the questions and other thoughts that the group members want to share.

## Giving Gratitude

## Closing Prayer

## Workshop Evaluation

### Giving Gratitude Notes:

Facilitators lead a discussion by asking each person to share something or someone that they are grateful for in a talking circle format – each person speaking in turn using the direction used in that specific traditional territory (clockwise or counterclockwise) and possible using a talking piece (stone or stick).

## **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX A

## SAMPLE AGENDA

### The Personal Experience of Loss

8:30 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 10:30	Opening Prayer and circle introductions Overview of workshop content and establishing “Circle of Trust” Values and Principles to Guide Our Group Experience
10:00 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 12:00	Loss, Grief and Bereavement First Nation Loss, Grief and Bereavement Small Group Discussion
12:00 – 1:00	<b><i>Lunch will be provided</i></b>
1:00 – 2:15	Discussion on small group experience and insights
2:15 – 2:30	Break
2:30 – 4:30	Processing Grief and Supporting our own Bereavement Discussion – closing comments for the day

### The Community Experience of Loss

9:00 – 10:30	Circle Reflections on Day 1 Revisiting Values and Principles First Nation Cultural Values, Practices and Protocols related to loss, grief and bereavement: brief overview Discussion on cultural values and practices
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 12:00	Small Group Discussion
12:00 – 1:00	<b><i>Lunch to be provided</i></b>
1:00 – 2:15	Deeply Reflective Practice in working with others Discussion on Experiences with reflective practice
2:15 – 2:30	Break
2:30 – 4:30	Building Compassionate Relationships Building personal capacity to process loss and supporting others in building capacity Discussion Giving Gratitude and closing prayer

# APPENDIX B

## ICEBREAKERS

### Why use icebreakers?

- They can create a positive group atmosphere
- Ice breakers can assist people in the room to relax
- They can energize & motivate
- Ice breakers can help people to get to know one another
- They can facilitate respect among participants in a group setting

### Mindfulness

It is important that the facilitators agree on choosing ice breakers that reflect the dynamic of the group. It is essential to be mindful of the size, literacy levels and physical limitations of group members before choosing any ice breakers.

#### 1) Name Game

**Equipment:** None

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Participants:** Partners/whole group

#### **Brief description:**

- Where does your name come from? Share the story of where your name comes from and what your name means. Everyone's name has a surprisingly interesting origin. Helps to build respect and understanding. Ask participants to turn to a partner and explain what your name means (if anything) and where it comes from.
- Most people reveal a surprising amount of interesting information about where their name comes from and what it means.
- Can be specifically used to help build respect and understanding or to more generally help develop self-identity and open respect and sharing.
- Optional: Ask each person to introduce his/her partner to the larger group and to explain what his/her name means and where it comes from.
- Optional: The activity can be extended into revealing the background behind other names e.g.,
  - Nicknames
  - Pets
  - Alter-ego or "fantasy name"
  - Names of children - or what would you name your children if you have them?

## **2) Winner/Loser**

**Time:** 5–6 minutes

**Purpose:** Negative to positive perspective

**Participants:** Partners

**Materials needed:** None

**Instructions:** One partner tells the other partner about something bad that happened to them. This can be personal or work-related and can have occurred recently or years ago, but it must be something that is over. They can take about two minutes to do this.

The same partner then tells the same story but this time relates the good things that came from this experience. The listening partner can help them explore the good that came from the bad.

Desired outcome: Participants experience a way to let go of negative attitudes and emotional baggage.

## **3) Dream Trip**

**Participants:** 6 - 50

**Timing:** 15 - 30 Minutes

This activity encourages participants to find out a bit more about their group members. Working in pairs, participants are asked to describe how they would spend their time and money if they were given one month away from their usual work and domestic routines and responsibilities with an unlimited budget.

These Dream Trips can then be shared with the group as a whole.

## **PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS**

## PHASES OF GRIEF

**Anticipatory Grief** - When it becomes clear that the death is going to happen, individuals and families may begin their grieving. This may include having some of the mind, body, heart and spirit related symptoms as presented.

**Acute Grief** - The immediate reaction to a death is different for people coming from different cultural backgrounds and religious or spiritual traditions. Each individual and family is also unique. Grief may begin within minutes or hours after death although delayed grief is not unusual. Grief may be expressed outwardly or remain silent.

**Chronic Phase** (not experienced by everyone) - May last for a few months but up to a few years – the person may stop seeing people, and become sad and depressed. The person may lack direction in their lives, be disorganized and lack a sense of purpose. They may experience yearning or searching for the lost loved one. The person may need “permission” to stop grieving.

**Reconciliation Phase** - The person is able to reorganize their thinking and their lives. The daily experience of grief becomes less. Memories can be recalled without sadness and new relationships can be formed without guilt. In many cases grief is never resolved or finished; it changes and becomes less acutely painful.

**Expected and Unexpected Death in Palliative Care** - In an expected death there is more opportunity to engage in anticipatory grief during a palliative care period prior to death. Support needs to be able to be provided over a longer period of time prior to death as the family and community walk with the dying person. In the case of sudden, unexpected or particularly traumatic death (death as a result of violence or suicide, for example) the grieving experience can be very acute and there is increased risk of complicated or chronic grief.

## **PROCESSING GRIEF**

### **Knowing when we have grief work to do:**

When we have a significant loss, it is important to find time to reflect on the loss and “listen to yourself” – allow yourself to feel all of your feelings. Understand that this most recent loss may be a trigger that may show you your “backlog of grief.” If you are sad, crying sometimes without warning, withdrawing from people and activities that you enjoy, changing the way you eat, sleep or use of addictive substances or experiences; you may have grieving work to do.

### **Finding an effective process or set of processes:**

Think about what has worked for you in the past, talk to people, try things out – journaling, meditating, prayer, connection with nature, ceremony, books, web sites, support groups etc.

### **Assessing progress:**

Review how it is going and if your process is stuck or you seem to be getting worse or not improving, you may need to seek additional help.

### **Methods – mainstream and cultural:**

Know yourself and the people around you and use what feels most comfortable and helpful. Do not hesitate to experiment with new things that feel safe and seem promising. A mainstream method might be seeing a counsellor or attending a support group. Cultural methods may include meeting with an Elder for teachings or support or attending a ceremony.

### **Complicated grief:**

Watch for signs of complicated grief such as those reviewed in slide 23 and get help if needed.

### **Additional supports:**

Look for people in your community that can be called on as additional supports – friends; family; community members; First Nation health and social staff; resident, telephone or visiting counsellors; hospice organizations; workshops; religious clergy; cultural helpers or ceremonialists.

## TEN ESSENTIAL TOUCHSTONES OF GRIEF

The ten touchstones of grief provide good advice for ourselves and for those we support:

### **Open to the presence of your loss:**

We cannot go around our grief – the only way is through the heart of it by acknowledging the pain and honouring it. With it comes your intention to heal.

### **Dispel misconceptions about grief:**

Grief and mourning are not the same thing. Grief is the internal thoughts and feelings we have when we experience loss. Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside of yourself – often with other people. Grief and mourning do not progress in predictable ways. You need to move toward grief not away from it. Tears are often a necessary expression of grief and mourning. Open mourning is not connected with being “weak in your faith.” When we lose a loved one, we miss not only the physical presence of the person but many other connections to yourself and the work around you. You have permission to think of the person on special days like birthdays. The goal is not to disconnect and “get over” grief – it is to find new connections. Others can help and the grief may continue to come up at times for many months or years to come.

### **Embrace the uniqueness of your grief:**

The wilderness of your grief is yours and is a creation of your unique self, the unique loss and the circumstances of your life. Differences may include: our relationship to the person who died or was affected by the loss; the circumstances of the death or loss; the ritual or funeral experience; the people in your life; your unique personality; the unique personality of the one who died or was affected by the loss; your gender; your cultural background; your religious or spiritual background; other crisis or stress in your life right now; your experiences with loss or death in the past; your physical health, and other things.

### **Explore your feelings of loss:**

Feel your feelings – explore the many and varied feelings of loss. As strange as some of the emotions might seem – such as numbness, relief or confusion, they are a true expression of where you are right now.

### **Recognize that you are not crazy:**

Feelings of grief related to loss involve normal human experiences. You are worried about developing a mental illness, seek help in assessing your experience to ease your mind or get additional help.

### **Understand the needs of mourning:**

The six needs of mourning a death are to accept the reality of the death; let yourself feel the pain of the loss; remember the person who died; develop a new self-identity; search for meaning and let others help you – now and always.

**Nurture yourself:**

The word “bereaved” means to be “torn apart” or to have special needs. Compassion means “with passion.” Caring for and about yourself with passion is self-compassion. Take care of yourself and let others take care of you – mind, body, spirit and heart as well as social connection.

**The Mourner’s code – ten self-compassion principles:**

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief
2. You have the right to talk about your grief
3. You have the right to feel a lot of different emotions
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits
5. You have the right to experience “grief bursts” or short intense experiences of emotion
6. You have the right to make use of ritual
7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality
8. You have the right to search for meaning
9. You have the right to treasure your memories
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal – be patient and tolerant with yourself.

**Reach out for help:**

Healing requires the support and understanding of those around you. Different people will take on various roles – some more able to “show up” than others. Be open to new and changing relationships.

**Seek reconciliation, not resolution:**

Your journey may never truly end – it will change and become less painful. Reconciliation is moving into a new reality with a new sense of energy and confidence – to be able to fully acknowledge the loss and also become involved again in the activities of living. You reach it through intentional mourning; by talking it out; writing it out; crying it out; thinking it out; playing it out; painting (or drawing etc.) it out; dancing or walking it out etc.

**Appreciate your transformation:**

The journey through grief is life changing – you are not the same person you were.

## GRIEF MAPPING EXERCISE

- Draw one circle with “**Grief**” at the center of it and connect feelings, thoughts, and behaviours to that experience.
- Draw a second circle with the word “**Stuck**” in the middle and connect all of the ways in which our natural grieving process can become stuck or sidetracked.
- Draw a third circle with “**Me**” in the center and connect the circle to names of people who you have shared grief with.
- Draw a forth circle with “**Love**” in the center and connect all of the things you do to express love or compassion for yourself and others around you in time of loss.

## **INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL VALUES, PRACTICES, PROTOCOLS**

Cultural values, practices and protocols differ between people, between families, between communities and across Canada. Values help to guide us on the path of life – in real life our behaviour does not always live up to our values. The values presented here are presented as an example of the kind of values often found in some form in First Nation communities. The practices and protocols are presented as categories of the kind of practices and protocols sometimes found in communities and the local sources of cultural information – Elders, resource people and participants will offer information on what is common in the area in which the workshop takes place.

### **Old and New Lifeways:**

Throughout Canada, First Nation people blend the old and new in their lifestyles. Cultural practices and approaches to food gathering, seasonal activities, health and healing co-exist along-side more modern lifestyles, often within the same person or family.

### **Similarities and Differences:**

Grief and Loss are part of every human life and many of the experiences we share. Each individual and family has a unique set of values that guide their everyday life and therefore, it is important that no assumptions are made about how individuals use or rely on common First Nation values in their lives. Each person and family needs to be assessed and understood as individuals within a relational context.

### **Common First Nation Values:**

Some values often associated with old and new First Nation culture and community life include:

#### **Respect:**

In a time honoured First Nation sense of respect, it is about holding other people, animals, plants and other offerings of Mother Earth as sacred gifts from Creator. Respect demonstrates a deeply felt gratitude and compassion for natural things that a person comes into contact with. Elders of the community are held in high regard and respect for the experience in life they have gained. They are honoured. As a result, the relative age of individuals in communication makes a difference in how respect operates – a person is expected to defer to, and respect, someone older than they are. Respect for the person who may be dying or directly experiencing loss as well as the choices people make in moving through grief and bereavement is fundamental to a First Nation approach to support.

#### **Sharing and Caring:**

Fundamental to the success of a collective society is the concept of sharing what you have and making contributions to the well-being of other members of the group. First Nation communities have always shared among the extended family and community with generosity and no expectation of reciprocity. The food, clothing and other wealth was freely shared. The caring was demonstrated in many ways including the love expressed for all members of the extended family and community. The caring flows out of a concern for all and is the basis for the sharing.

Caring for each other and sharing the experience of loss between individuals and within families and communities is fundamental to experiencing helpful support to ease the suffering.

**Spirituality:**

Spirituality was, and for some First Nation people remains, a very practical and fundamental part of daily living. The connection to spiritual support is provided by direct dialogue with Creator, Great Spirit, God or other helpers such as animals, birds or spirit helpers which may take the form of ancestors. Gratitude is expressed for the gifts of the day and guidance sought about the tasks of the day. Many people have become involved with organized religions and others have maintained beliefs more consistent with community history. Some have found a comfortable way of integrating the two. A person “who believes in nothing” is someone to be pitied in traditional First Nation thinking because they are seen as turning their backs on the extraordinary support and guidance offered through the practice of spirituality. Making meaning of an experience of loss often involves connection to “all that is universal” in line with personal spiritual or religious beliefs.

**Connection with the Land:**

Land is seen as a gift from the Creator and sacred place for connecting with our own humanity. It is “on loan” to human beings and we are expected to take good care of it for future generations. This is a concept of the responsibility for stewardship of the land. People live out their spirituality through “living a good life as a good person in a good way.” This includes time on the land and the expression of respect and spiritual connection to the land in daily activities. The land can be a wonderful healer and nature can contribute to our sense of connection to the larger world; all of which can be helpful in grieving loss.

**Interconnectedness:**

All things of the earth including plants, animals and other inanimate natural parts of the earth are seen as connected. It is thought that the true nature of our existence can only be seen through understanding connections. This is in direct contrast to scientific theory and contemporary techniques for analysis that stresses “breaking things down.” Frameworks for understanding connections that are used include the four directions, four aspects of self or medicine wheel and the elements (earth, water, sky/air, and fire). The ripple effects of grief affect a large circle of extended family and community and disrupt our connections to our human family and the natural world. Healing is often seen as the restoring of connection in the interconnectedness of all things.

**Harmony and Balance:**

Harmony and balance are highly-valued as conflict is seen as a threat to the survival and well-being of the community. Conflict or illness is seen as the result of imbalance within the person, family, clan or community. In order to restore harmony, balance must be restored. Traditional medicine practices and other spiritual and faith based help are often directed toward the restoration of balance. Loss disrupts harmony and balance and needs to be restored through the grieving and mourning experience.

**Extended Family:**

The extended family is a basic unit of social organization and extends far beyond the limits of the nuclear family. Membership in the family has rights associated with it in terms of asking for help or support and also has responsibilities in being expected to fulfill your duty to help others within the family if you are in a position to do so. As families are large and connected throughout the community, the ripple effect of loss is far reaching but so is the strength pulled from large extended families in challenging times. In some communities, children are limited in their contact with the bereaved or protected in specific ways due to fear of how the soul of the departed may affect the child.

**Collective:**

Indigenous people have always lived in collective society and traditionally, the survival and interests of the whole society were held above the interests of the individual members. Within the collective, every person has their place and their contribution to make. All contributions are seen as valuable and as good as the contributions made by others. Decisions were made on consensus and competitiveness between members of the group was seen as potentially harmful to group cohesion. Loss and grief are not seen as only individual experiences – the burden is shared among the collective and the collective is disrupted by a death, for example.

**Gender Specific Roles and Responsibilities:**

Historically, the extended family and clan had very important responsibilities in raising girls to be women and boys to be men. Specific aunts or uncles as directed by the Elders played important roles within some linguistic groups. The “coming of age” was marked by ceremony and was very important to the whole community. Many tasks were gender specific although women also trapped and hunted, often for smaller game. In community responses to grief and bereavement, there are often specific roles for men and women to play.

**Gratitude:**

The expression of gratitude for all that is offered by mother earth every day is seen as a fundamental requirement for ongoing abundance. If there is no gratitude, there will be no food. Gratitude is connected to respect and together they ensure relationships between people and the natural world are not disrupted. Gratitude for the love and support often expressed between people in times of loss and the new ways of seeing our lives following our active mourning period may be features of the Aboriginal loss experience.

## **CULTURAL PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS**

Each Nation also has cultural practices and protocols that may differ between communities, between families and between individuals. Understanding the protocols or practices may be helpful to yourself and those you may seek to support through loss and grieving. Participating in ceremony, ritual, religious services or sacraments and other practices may be very comforting to individuals and families.

Protocols are the way in which “things are done” and therefore, have “dos” and “don’ts” attached.

It is important to understand the protocols that are active in a specific family or community and respect them in providing support.

Some areas of relationship in which protocols may be active are:

### **Communication, Gender and Relationships:**

- Communication – for example, is there a difference in communicating with a person of the opposite gender (men and women) or communicating with a child or an Elder including “do not interrupt” rules
- Relationships – how to develop relationships and specific guidelines on developing relationships with cultural helpers or Elders; how to use physical contact in relationship development
- Gender Roles and Responsibilities – respect between men and women and honouring of physical objects that are owned by a person of the opposite gender
- Matriarchal and patriarchal roles and head of house protocols
- Confrontation or Conflict – how to deal with confrontation or conflict in the community – for example use of a third party helper or person working between the two people in conflict

Protocols in this area may affect the quality of communication, conflict resolution and relationship building throughout the palliative care and grieving process.

### **Expected Behaviour:**

- Dress and behaviour code – appropriate dress for community service provision, meetings and special events; public use of alcohol
- Regalia, Drums and Sacred Items – protocols on respect of regalia, drums and other sacred objects including how to talk about these items and “don’t touch” rules

First Nations may have rules for how people are expected to dress or behave around the dying, the grieving family or at mourning related community events.

### **Community and Family Events:**

- Home visiting – any protocols that need to be respected in home visiting
- Death or Loss – protocols on community preparation and response to death or other loss and later in the mourning process
- Funeral traditions – when funerals or other ceremony are used to mark community life and how a newcomer or community member might participate – for example, do they have to wait for a formal invitation to attend

Each family or community may have rules around who will visit to dying person's home or the home of the bereaved. The way in which families respond to loss and grief and the ways in which these events are marked by traditions and ceremonies are important to understand.

### **Cultural Laws and Practices:**

- Cultural laws – what are the cultural laws that need to be understood
- Cultural health and healing – how do traditional health and healing practices operate in the community and how might a resource worker refer a person to individuals offering cultural health and healing assistance
- Protocols on how to approach Elders for advice or teachings, how to access traditional or cultural knowledge

The roles played by Elders, spiritual or religious leaders and cultural people in the palliative care and grieving processes are also important to understand and support. Cultural laws may be in force about how cultural knowledge is accessed and used; how the community relates to the bereaved families and how individuals play roles in support of the funeral and grieving process. For example, there may be individuals assigned to sit with the family or the body of the deceased, prepare the body for burial, offer prayers or songs etc. These roles may be based in religious or spiritual traditions or beliefs.

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