

Grief and Loss Literacy: Knowledge to help us heal.

MAiD in Practice Conference
September 20, 2024



Grief defined



Some things in life
cannot be fixed.
They can only be
carried. Megan
Devine

My hope for today ...

- You walk away feeling less isolated
- You learn something helpful
- You feel relieved
- You feel a wee bit more confident asking for support
- You appreciate how unique our grief is
- You understand that we all cope differently, and that's OK
- You feel inspired to continue to learn more





Loss, grief: go at your own pace

Author offers many ways forward after her own deep loss

BY NEVIL HUNT

When Dina Bell-Laroche lost her sister Tracy, she realized how difficult it is to talk about death.

She also discovered that we all learn to deal with grief in different ways, even when society suggests your time to grieve should come to an end.

She documented the events and emotions before and after her sister died.

"I'm a journalist, so keeping journals was natural," Bell-Laroche said.

Those notes and experiences have become a book, entitled *Grief Unleashed: Moving from the hole in our hearts to whole-hearted*.

The book is presented in a journalistic style. Instead of

prescribing a particular way of grieving as the only correct path, she has researched many books and articles, and presents each of them to the reader for consideration.

In each case, Bell-Laroche

"Your life is in transition after a loss. And we shame ourselves into silence."

Dina Bell-Laroche

introduces and summarizes a suggestion from another writer, looks at the pros and cons, and explains how she incorporated their theories into her own grief. She then leaves it to the reader to decide if the suggestions might help them

deal with their own grief. The result is a work that continually provides new ideas for the reader and allows them to pick and choose approaches that connect with them. It's as far from one-size-fits-all as a book can be.

"Your life is in transition after a loss," she said. "And we shame ourselves into silence."

"We hear people say, 'Move on.'"

She said that when we are instead pressured to follow paths by others, we may end up tamping down how we really feel.

"If you're stoic and silent, people think you're doing well."

"Our society rewards speed and outcome. You get well-meaning people who will say things like, 'Well, at least you

have other children.' We get these platitudes."

Bell-Laroche said our society makes it uncomfortable to talk about death. But, rest assured, "There's a more helpful way to talk about it."

Her sister's death due to cancer sent her on a "roller coaster ride."

"We never talked about it. We didn't want to say it out loud. I don't have many regrets but one regret is not having a conversation with her."

AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

Bell-Laroche said "grief is the highest expression of love," and the more we loved someone, the more we will grieve.

There's no right or wrong, although she recommends professional help if grief becomes unbearable.

"Restoration and renewal happens slow and steady," she said.

She said she still experiences sudden surges in grief due to the loss of her sister. She might be walking in a mall and hear a Christmas Carol that stirs a memory and causes her tears. But tears don't mean you're not reacting appropriately.

"This (grief) keeps us connected and we can learn to be kinder to ourselves."



Nevil Hunt photo

Dina Bell-Laroche has researched many different approaches to grief since the loss of her sister Tracy. She has compiled a wide range of ideas in her book *Grief Unleashed: Moving from the hole in our hearts to whole-hearted*.

when Tracy passed didn't have the time or training to explain the grieving process, so most people never consider what's about to unfold

said. "Trauma carries grief and if you don't deal with the trauma you just keep the grief in a box and you don't deal with it."

UPCOMING ISSUES





Re-imagine

a new relationship with loss.

In our culture ...

- **Grief illiterate** ... we don't use the right language to talk about death and loss
- **Death phobic** ... we avoid talking about the things that scare us
- **Reward people who** ... move on, get past it, don't talk openly about their pain, focus on the future
- **Rush people** ... we put a timeline to our grief
- **Don't know how to help** ... we have a limited understanding of how to support the bereaved



"Just get over it!"

It's not that easy...



Hierarchy to Grief

- Not all grief is created equal
- People may not understand our experience as loss
- We impose rules based on what society defines as acceptable

“
Those we love **never**
truly leave us. There
are things that death
cannot touch.

—
JACK THORNE

... Grief, is our natural, involuntary & universal response to loss

Tangible Losses

- People
- Homeland
- House
- Pets
- Finances
- Business
- Job/
Employment

Intangible Losses

- Relationships
- Identity
- Health, mobility
- Cognitive capacity
- Freedom
- Belonging
- Roles and responsibilities
- Hopes, dreams

**Grief is
not linear**





... How we might experience Grief



Emotional: feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt, self-reproach, yearning, anxiety, loneliness, and ...

Somatic: physical symptoms, fatigue, tightness of chest, weakness, dry mouth, oversensitivity to noise and sound, sleep and appetite disturbances, restlessness, recklessness, and ...

Social: friends and family might withdraw, teammates all respond differently, coach may

Cognitive: disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, negative self-talk, blame, if only's, and ...

Spiritual: Loss of hope, shattered worldview, faith-based questioning, and ...

Grief Experiences



EARLY ON (days, weeks, months) ...

- Shock (can be misunderstood as depression)
- Numbness, avoidance, denial
- Confused, dazed, bewildered, surreal
- Fatigue, emotionally exhausted
- Disorganized thoughts, emotions and behaviors
- Repetitive thoughts
- Loss of interest in work or working more
- Changes in sleeping/ eating patterns
- Helplessness, isolation, loneliness
- Focus on the past

Grief Experiences

LATER ON (and for the rest of your life ...)

- Reinvestment of energy
- Living with less emotional pain
- Adapting to the loss, redefined relationship with person who died
- STUG: Subsequent Temporary Upsurges of Grief
- Able to focus on the future
- Longing to reconnect with the deceased through enriched remembrances
- Finding purpose and meaning because of the loss, not in spite of it

Anticipatory Grief



- Grief reactions before an impending loss
- It may include many emotions, shifts in worldview, somatic changes, as we accompany people at end of life
- It may include relationship and role changes
- Not everyone experiences it ... it requires an acceptance of the inevitable

Disenfranchised Grief:

Grief that people experience when they sustain a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported.

Kenneth J. Doka



Disenfranchised grief and MAiD



- Stigma and the lack of social support surrounding MAiD can complicate the bereavement experience
- Physical pain is used to justify the morality of MAiD ... serving as a moralizing agent
- Unacknowledged emotional pain can lead to complex bereavement
- Disagreement among family members about the choice of MAiD can lead to secondary forms of loss, increasing the risk of prolonged grief



Ambiguous Loss

- A loss without closure:
 - Type 1: Physical absence, with psychological presence.
 - Type 2: Psychological absence, with physical presence.

Dr. Pauline Boss



Continuing Bonds

After death and loss



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

Grief ... it's complicated

- Added to the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders) in 2022
- Defined as “intense and persistent grief that causes problems and interferes with daily life for at least 1 year for adults and 6 months for children.
- May be referenced as Prolonged, Chronic or Complicated Grief



Support looks like ...

- Reach out to a trusted friend
- Speak to your doctor a grief informed therapist and/or a trusted friend
- Set grief goals
- Most bereaved persons can process grief through:
 - Storytelling
 - Identifying and dealing with obstacles
 - Memory projects
 - Time
 - Setting personal goals and connecting to their values
 - Meaning making



Saakvitne & Pearlman (1996)

“self-care is an ethical imperative. We have an obligation to our clients – as well as to ourselves, our colleagues, and our loved ones – not to be damaged by the work we do.”

Coping style

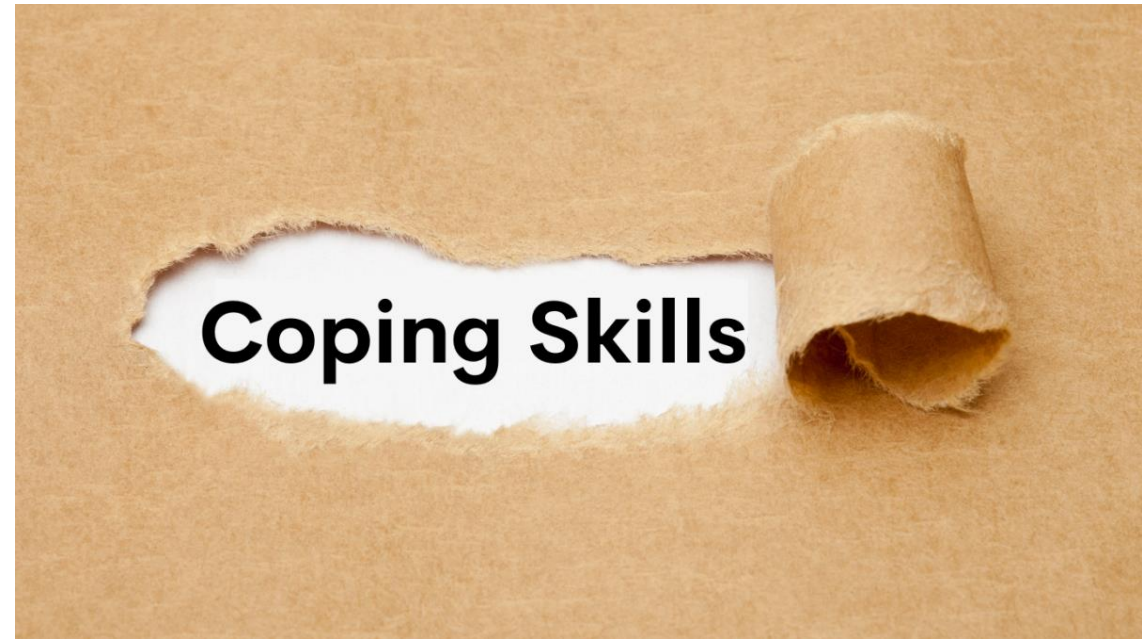
- We all **cope differently** and there are some patterns to how we navigate difficult times
- Knowing our **“LOVE LANGUAGE”** can help us better ask for the support we need. Are you the kind of person that respond better to:
 - Gifts
 - Touch
 - Time
 - Acts of service
 - Words of appreciation
- **Gender may influence** how we grieve but is not the only factor



What is your coping style?



- Take a moment to consider your love language.
- Make a list of your adaptive (healthy) and maladaptive (unhealthy) coping style.
- Have a conversation with your colleagues about your list.
- How does knowing your love language help you ask for what you need when you are grieving? How might it help you support others?
- Let's share.



Things that can help



- Be **kind to yourself**. Ensure you drink enough water, eat nutritious foods, move your body, get enough sleep, and express your emotions
- **Find friends** who will not **'at least you'** or try and move you too quickly through your grief
- **Boundaries** ... I know, it's hard. It gets harder when we don't create them.
- Journal
- Time in **nature**
- Learn more about **grief and loss**
- Speak your person's **name**
- Consider ways to **continue your bond** with your person ... honoring their deathiversary, sharing stories, displaying pictures, hosting memorial events, conducting fundraisers, wearing their clothes ... what other creative ways can you continue your bond?

Sitting silently
beside a friend
who is hurting
may be the best
gift we can give.

-unknown

The art of companioning

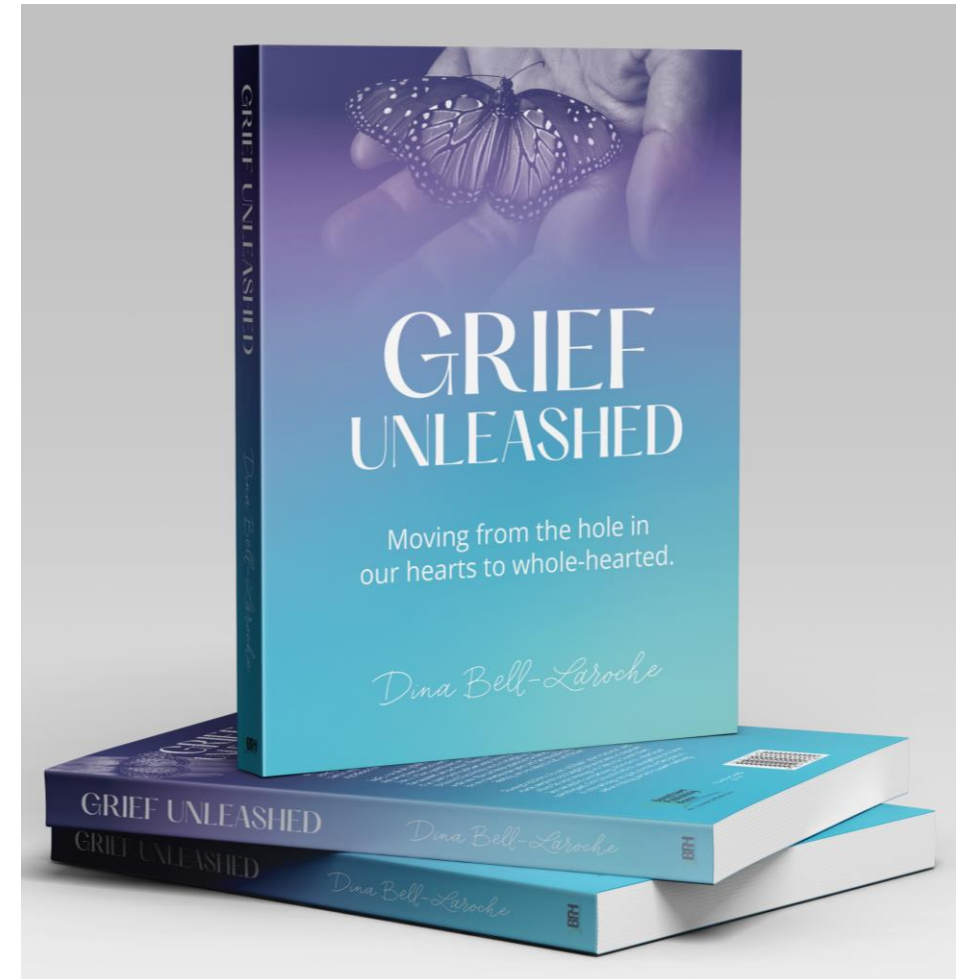


<https://youtu.be/l2zLCCRT-nE>

Reading Materials



- Grief Unleashed: Moving from the hole in our hearts to whole-hearted
- Understanding your Grief by Dr. Alan Wolfelt
- The Sixth Stage of Grief by David Kessler
- It's OK that you're Not OK by Megan Devine
- The Wild Edge of Sorrow by Francis Weller
- Poetry
- The Grieving Place through www.griefunleashed.ca



Re-imagine
a new relationship with loss.



Reach out to Dina at dina@griefunleashed.ca or www.griefunleashed.ca