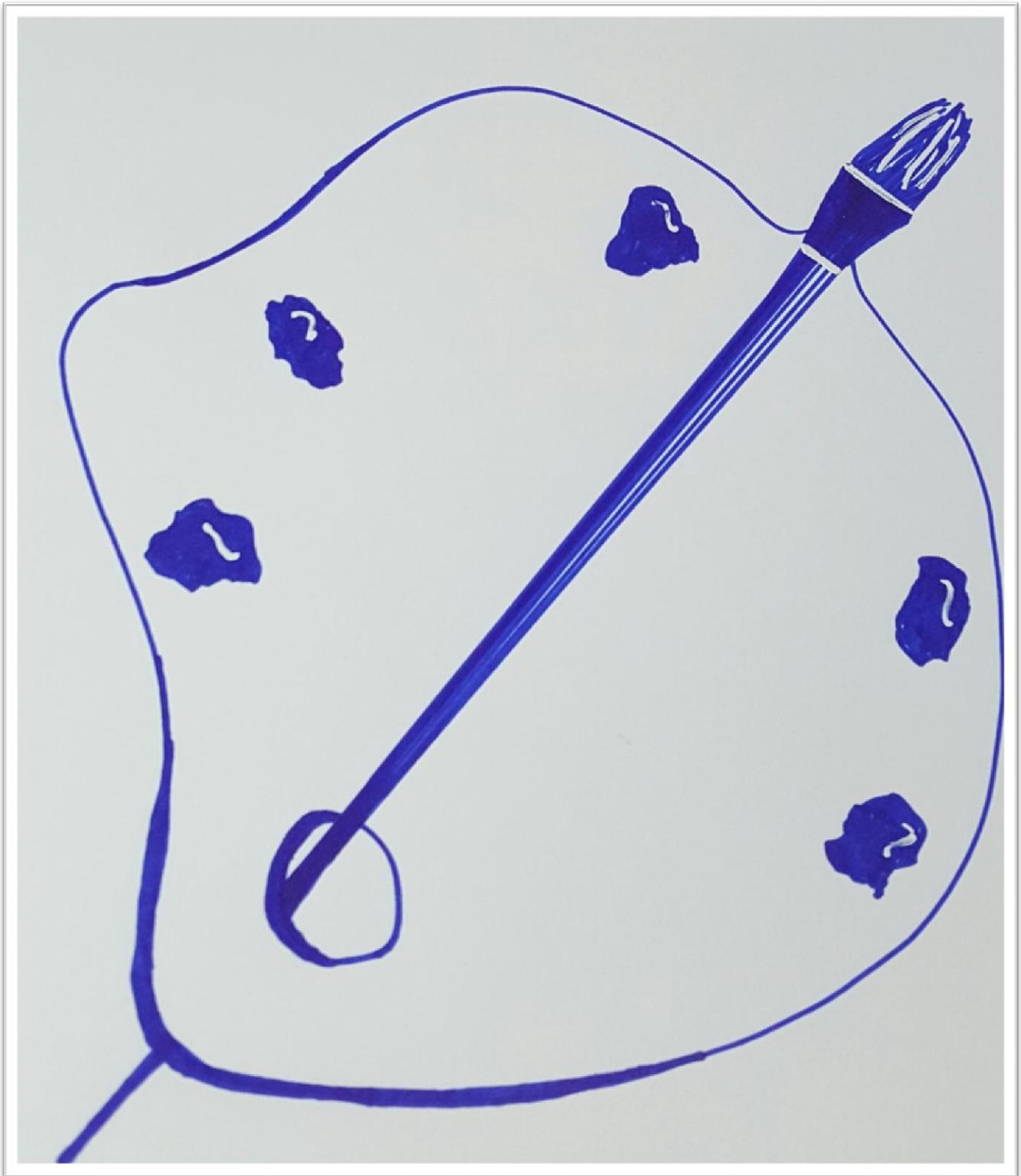


Palette of Grief®

Emotions☐ Thoughts☐ Behaviors☐ Physical☐ Spiritual☐



Palette of Grief®

Instructions

What is a Palette of Grief? Palette of Grief® is an activity that visually captures your grief reactions due to non-death and death related losses. Metaphors are the use of rhetorical expression that helps you fully grasp your narrative, which is your story of loss. You may describe what happened as a journey or a roller coaster ride. For the metaphor, *Palette of Grief*, the primary concept is a palette, which is literally a thin and usually oval flat tablet with a thumb hole at one end that painters hold and use to blend a range of paint colors. When the palette is metaphorically applied to loss, it becomes that which holds and blends physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual reactions after a final separation.

Where the Idea of Palette of Grief® Came From After Barbara Rubel's father's suicide, she was painting a watercolor picture. Almost finished, a glass of water spilled which caused the colors to mix into one another. The flowers became a blend of various shades. This experience made her think how grief reactions are similar to a blending of colors. Palette of Grief® has become her metaphor for loss which compares an *artist's palette* to *grief reactions*.

Suggestions for Use This activity can be used as a springboard to talk about what happened and ultimately, find meaning in it. The graphic image spurs you to a deeper understanding of your reactions to a difficult life challenge and may be completed during bereavement support groups, individual counseling sessions, and grief therapy, at home and in healthcare and mental health professional training sessions. The activity can be repeated months after the initial creation of a Palette of Grief® (e.g. 3, 6, and 12 months). Retain it for reference and comparison of reactions.

Contraindications for Use This activity is best suited for use after several weeks have passed since a death related or traumatic event. It should not be completed if you have recently experienced a loss and are acutely feeling intense reactions.

Materials Each person needs 5 different color markers, 1 Palette of Grief®, 5 lists of reactions, and the page Understanding Your Palette of Grief.

Instructions

- **Time Required.** Approximately 1 hour.
- **Group Size.** There is no limit to the group size. Groups can be divided into subgroups of two or more, depending upon group size. Each person must have time to share a completed palette. Although this activity is for those experiencing uncomplicated grief, social workers and psychiatric nurses who treat those with persistent complex bereavement disorder or complex or prolonged grief disorder may consider doing this activity with their client or patient individually and not in a group setting.
- **Physical Setting.** Tables are needed. Each person needs support in order to write.
- **5 Markers.** Place many different color markers in the center of the table or give each person five different color markers. These markers represent one of five types of grief reactions.
- **Palette of Grief®.** This picture looks like an artist's palette. This is the page where you will write your words (reactions) within the border of the palette. There is a paint brush that rests on the middle part of the palette. You will write above the brush as well as below the brush.
- **5 Pages of Reactions.** Emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, and spiritual reactions.
- **Understanding Your Palette of Grief.** This page will help you to interpret your completed Palette of Grief®.

Let's Get Started

The task is to create an image of a palette that captures your overall reactions to *one particular loss*. Although you may have experienced more than one loss, only focus on one death/non-death related loss per palette. You can also create several other palettes once this one is complete. Keep the Palette of Grief® (picture) in front of you along with 5 markers. Start with the emotional reactions page. Here are the steps to complete your palette.

Step 1—Emotional Reactions

To begin, choose one color marker. “*ONLY*” use this color for emotional reactions. Check off the “*Emotional*” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page. Now take out the *Emotional Reactions* page.

- **At the time of your loss**, if you felt any of the emotions listed, write the word(s) inside the *top* of your palette above the paint brush. You may write one word or several words on the top part of your palette. Words can be written large or small. Be as creative as you would like. Take a brief break.
- **Presently**: Now that you have focused on your past experience, concentrate on present feelings. If you currently feel any emotional reactions listed on the emotional reactions page, write those words inside the space on the bottom part of your palette. After you have reviewed the list, put down your marker.

Step 2—Cognitive/Thoughts

Next, pick another color marker to represent your thoughts. Check off the “*Thoughts*” box on top of the page. Next, take out the “*Cognitive Reactions*” page.

- **At the time of your loss**, if you thought about any of the cognitions listed, write the word(s) inside the top of your palette above the paint brush. You may write one word or several words on the top of your palette. Take a brief break.
- **Presently**: Now that you have focused on the immediate aftermath, concentrate on your current thoughts. If lately you have experienced any of the thoughts listed due to your loss, write the word(s) inside the space on the bottom part of your palette. After you have reviewed the cognitive list, put down your marker.

Step 3—Behavioral Reactions

Now choose a different marker. Check off the “*Behavioral*” box. Take out the “*Behavioral Reactions*” page.

- **At the time of your loss**, if you conducted yourself in a certain way, write the word(s) inside the top of your palette. You may write one word or several words on the top of your palette. Take a brief break.
- **Presently**: Now that you have focused on your past experience, concentrate on your current behaviors. If you currently conduct yourself a certain way because of your loss, write the word(s) inside the space on the bottom part of your palette. After you have reviewed the list, put down your marker.

Step 4—Physical Reactions

Select a different marker. Check off the “*Physical*” box. Next take out the “*Physical Reactions*” page.

- **At the time of your loss**, if you experienced any physical reactions, write the word(s) inside the top of your palette. You may write one word or several words on the top of your palette. Take a brief break.
- **Presently**: Now that you have focused on your past experience, concentrate on present physical reactions. If lately you experience any physical reactions due to your loss, write the word(s) inside the space on the bottom part of your palette. After you have reviewed the list, put down your marker.

Step 5—Spiritual Reactions

Finally, choose a different color marker to represent your spiritual reactions. Check off the “*Spiritual*” box on top of the page. Next take out the “*Spiritual Reactions*” page.

- **At the time of your loss**, if you experienced any spiritual reactions, write the word(s) inside the top of your palette. Write one or several words on the top of your palette. Take a brief break.
- **Presently**: Now that you have focused on your past experience, concentrate on your current spiritual reactions. If you currently have any spiritual reactions due to your loss, write those word(s) inside the space on the bottom of your palette.

Emotional Reactions

- I have accepted what happened
- I am afraid of living
- I feel agitated
- I am aggravated
- I am angry
- I am annoyed
- I am anxious
- I am apathetic
- I am apprehensive
- I feel betrayed
- I am bewildered
- I am bitter because of what happened
- I blame myself or someone else
- I am bored
- I feel contempt
- I am in denial
- I feel despair
- I feel detached like a floating feeling
- I am devastated
- I am disgusted
- I feel disconnected from others
- I am emancipated
- I miss being emotionally dependent
- I feel empty
- I am envious
- I have become estranged from family
- I fear I might harm myself or others
- I am fearful of losing others
- I feel frazzled
- I am frustrated
- I feel gloomy
- I am grateful
- I feel grouchy
- I feel guilt over acts of commission or omission
- I have survivor guilt
- I am hateful
- I feel helpless
- I feel horror
- I feel humiliated
- I am hurt
- I am incompetent
- I feel incomplete
- I am irritable
- I feel jealous
- I am joyful
- I feel lonely
- I feel longing
- I feel lost
- I am miserable
- I am moody
- I am emotionally numb
- I feel nervous
- I am outraged
- I am overwhelmed
- I feel panicky
- I am peaceful
- I am pessimistic
- I am puzzled
- I feel relief
- I feel rejected
- I feel remorse
- I feel sadness
- I have self-doubt
- I feel shame
- My world is shattered
- I feel emotionally shocked
- I have shut down
- I feel stigmatized
- I am surprised
- I feel terrorized
- I am torn
- I feel uncertain
- I feel useless
- I am vengeful
- I am worried
- I am yearning for my loved one

Cognitive Reactions

- I have trouble accepting the death
- I am apathetic
- I avoid reminders
- I have a negative attitude
- I was abandoned
- I am absentminded
- I have brain fog
- I think I am going crazy
- I avoid certain thoughts
- I think that I did the best I could
- I just can't believe he/she is gone
- I am closed minded
- I have trouble concentrating
- I feel contempt
- I am not in control
- I am confused (i.e. suicide, identity)
- I criticize myself
- I dwell on one negative detail instead of the whole picture
- I have trouble making decisions
- I have difficulty making plans
- I don't believe it happened
- I am disorientated
- I don't belong
- I don't understand
- I don't think I changed
- I have exaggerated thinking
- I think I am a failure
- I have flashbacks
- I am flooded by my thoughts
- I am forgetful
- I have fragmented memories
- I have experienced hallucinations
- I deserve to be happy
- I have homicidal ideation
- I am hyper-vigilant
- I am indecisive
- I cannot let it out
- I jump to conclusions
- I think life is too hard to endure
- I think people are tired of listening to me
- I have learned negative things about her/him that have changed my view of her/him
- My life just seems different
- I feel lost
- I fear I am losing my mind
- I have nightmares
- I have obsessive thinking
- I'm oddly aware of things related to death
- I often think about how short life is
- I am outraged
- I am a perfectionist
- I am preoccupied with the death
- I think I have to be perfect
- I am perplexed
- The perception I have of myself has changed
- I can't recall certain memories
- I recall times when I could have made my loved one's life more pleasant
- I have a reduced attention span
- I am ruminating (thinking over and over)
- I make a lot of "I should" statements
- I see only the negative
- I am searching for an explanation
- I can't make sense out of it
- I have a low self-esteem
- I have no sexual interest
- I don't feel safe
- I speculate on what should have been done
- I think about taking my own life
- I think of him/her all of the time
- I have difficulty trusting others
- I have a sense of unreality
- I have unwanted pictures in my head
- I feel worthless
- I have all-or-nothing thinking
- I repeatedly ask "Why?"

Behavioral Reactions

- I have put my feelings into my art work
- I try to stay active
- I am apologetic
- I have been careless and clumsy
- I call out to my deceased loved one
- I have been drinking alcohol
- I have changed my routine
- I am compulsively gambling
- I am compulsively exercising
- I am addicted to the Internet
- My drug use is causing problems
- I avoid reminders of deceased
- I am aggressive
- I laugh at inappropriate times
- I stay in bed all day
- I have kept the belongings intact
- I bite my nails
- I have become fidgety
- I seek forgiveness
- I am losing things
- I carry special objects
- I have decreased activities
- I cry and feel tearful
- I have difficulty with relationships
- I can't function socially
- I am eating very little/too much
- I have been depending on caffeine and/or nicotine to regulate my mood and energy
- I have provided forgiveness
- I have inappropriate humor
- I have become introverted
- I have become impatient
- I mistrust others
- I listen to music now more than ever before
- I am moody
- I neglect my responsibilities
- I have become overprotective
- I am excessively organizing
- I have outbursts
- I pace
- I look at photos
- I am a perfectionist
- I have a passion for prevention
- I procrastinate
- I am preoccupied
- I have become quiet
- I feel reckless
- I have restless hyperactivity
- I scan my surroundings
- I seek out places
- I have problems with sexual functioning
- I find myself sighing a lot
- I am becoming sexually promiscuous
- I have become self-destructive
- I am spending too much money
- I have sleep disturbances
- I am searching for clues
- I am isolating from usual networks
- I am having speech problems
- I have a strained face
- I grind my teeth
- I talk excessively
- I can't talk about it
- I treasure certain items
- I work out at the gym more than ever before
- My work performance has changed
- I have conflicts with co-workers
- I need to facilitate a support group
- I have a need to visit online message boards/Internet chat rooms

Physical Reactions

- I have aches/pains
- I have new food allergy
- I have arthritis
- I have asthma
- I have backaches
- I have difficulty catching my breath
- I have elevated cholesterol
- I have cardiovascular disease
- I have pounding heart or chest pain
- I have cold chills or hot flashes
- I have a lump in my throat
- I have frequent colds
- I am constipated
- I have decreased resistance to illness
- I am depressed
- I have diarrhea
- I have dry mouth
- I feel dizzy
- I have worsening eczema
- I have lost my energy
- I am exhausted
- I have eye strain
- I have been feeling faint
- I am fatigued
- I have headaches
- I have high blood pressure
- I grind my teeth
- I have increased hair loss
- I feel heavy as though I am carrying around a ton of bricks
- I have heartburn
- I have hives
- I have insomnia
- I have “jelly legs”
- I am lightheaded
- I feel muscle tension
- I am nauseous
- I have a pain in my neck
- I have a peptic ulcer
- I have a rapid heartbeat
- I feel restlessness even though I am sitting still
- I feel rundown
- I feel intense pangs of separation distress
- My sexual desire has changed
- I feel shaky on the inside
- I have skin problems
- I have shortness of breath
- My sleep patterns have changed
- I find myself sighing a lot
- I have slowed down
- I’m easily startled by noise/touch
- I have stomach bloating or pain
- I have burning in the pit of my stomach
- I have trouble swallowing
- I suddenly sweat
- I have same symptoms as deceased
- I have nervous twitches
- I am very tense
- I am thirsty
- I tremble
- I frequently need to urinate
- I have an unsteady voice
- I feel weakened
- I experienced changes in weight
- My overall health has changed
- I feel a void
- I have butterflies in my stomach

Spiritual Reactions

- I have abandoned my faith
- I believe in an afterlife
- I created an altar
- I feel awakened by my experience
- I have revised my beliefs
- I believe in angels
- I feel blessed
- I make mental affirmations
- I have profound coincidences
- I am angry at God
- I believe that a loving God would never have let this happen
- I am apathetic about the future
- My beliefs are a source of strength
- I have become cynical
- My loved one comes to me in my dreams
- My loved one is in heaven
- My loved one is in hell
- I heard the deceased speaking to me
- I have detected my loved one's cologne/perfume
- I have felt my loved one's presence
- I saw the deceased for a moment
- I continue the bonds with deceased
- I have difficulty attending a place of worship
- I feel empty
- I feel enlightened
- I have a stronger faith
- I have increased gratitude
- I feel God's grace
- My view of God has changed
- I don't understand why God did not heal my loved one
- I don't think God cares about me
- I feel forsaken
- I have offered my forgiveness
- I feel grateful
- I use my experience to help someone else
- I feel hopeless
- I feel hopeful
- I feel an inner peace
- I am joyful
- I feel judged
- I judge others
- I believe in Karma
- My life is empty or meaningless
- I have a greater love for things
- I found meaning in what happened
- I question the meaning of my life
- I meditate
- I believe in miracles
- I no longer believe in miracles
- I have difficulty moving on
- I need God's love more than ever
- I question why God let this happen
- I create rituals that help me
- I have noticed objects move or disappear/reappear
- I search other faiths
- I search for proof of life after death
- I find comfort through prayer
- My sense of purpose has changed
- I no longer attend religious services
- My situation is a valuable lesson from God
- I attend services more than ever
- I enjoy singing hymns
- I can no longer praise God
- I question why people suffer
- I believe the world is a bad place
- I believe the world is a good place

Understanding Your Palette of Grief®

Now that you have completed the activity, refer to the checked box on top of the Palette of Grief® page as a reminder of what each color represents. For example, if a color stands out on your palette, and that color represents emotions, then you may be more of an emotional griever. If you chose green to represent spiritual reactions and notice that most reactions are green, then your reactions have affected you spiritually.

As you review your palette, keep in mind that the words on the top of your palette represent emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical and spiritual reactions you experienced at the time of your loss. Words written on the bottom of your palette reflect your current reactions to that loss.

Although this exercise is enlightening, it can also be exhausting if you aren't ready to explore your reactions. Confronting grief reactions can be painful. Be aware of your mood. If you are not feeling well, examine the palette at another time. If overwhelmed, stop the exercise. Focus on your breathing and relax. Do a self-soothing activity. When you feel ready, interpret your palette, or if you are in therapy, complete a palette with your therapist.

Notes:

Interpretation

Palette of Grief® will become the starting point that helps you manage your grief reactions. Here are questions to consider “after” you have completed the activity:

- As you compare the top part of your palette (reactions at the time of loss) to the bottom part of your palette (current reactions), how have your reactions changed?
- Are you surprised by the way your palette turned out?
- If there is a word that is upsetting, what is the significance of that word?
- If a color stands out, what type of reaction does it represent?
- Are there any words deliberately excluded because it’s too painful for you to write down?
- Which three words on your palette are you “not” comfortable discussing with others?
- How would you explain your Palette of Grief® to someone who does not know your story?
- How risky would it be to reveal and discuss your Palette of Grief® with a family member or friend?
- Would you rate your insight good, fair, or poor in understanding your grief reactions?
- How can positive self-talk help you to cope with some of the difficult grief reactions you listed?
- In what ways do you problem-solve to deal with complex grief reactions?
- What relaxation skills help you to calm down when overwhelmed by any of your grief reactions?
- How do you nurture yourself spiritually to cope with your grief reactions?
- Have any grief-related websites helped you to cope with your loss?
- What do you sometimes do to distract yourself from your grief reactions?
- What practical tasks do you need to do to improve your ability to manage your grief reactions?
- What new roles or relationship have been formed because of your loss?
- Has any positive psychological change occurred due to your struggling with your grief reactions?
- Have you searched for and found positive meaning in your loss?
- In what ways can you be more self-compassionate to manage your reactions?
- How can any of your personal strengths (e.g. curious, creative, love of learning, judgement, perspective, brave, prudence, self-regulation, fair, leadership, teamwork, appreciate of beauty and excellence, playfulness, zest, perseverance, hopeful, forgiveness, honesty, love, social intelligence, spiritual, humility, and kindness) help you to manage your grief reactions?
- What do you ultimately hope to happen as a result of completing a Palette of Grief®?

