

Palette of Grief®

Emotions

Thoughts

Behaviors

Physical

Spiritual



Palette of Grief®

Palette of Grief® is an activity that visually captures emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and physical and spiritual reactions due to difficult life events.

The Palette of Grief® illustrates a perspective that is as unique as you are. The graphic image spurs you to a deeper understanding of grief reactions. The purpose of this activity is to develop a symbolic image of your loss experience and use it as a springboard to talk about what happened and ultimately, find meaning in it.

Suggestions for Use

This activity should first be completed by a professional helper to explore his or her own unique loss experience. Although this activity is most often used for death related losses, a professional who has not experienced a death related loss, can apply the Palette of Grief® experience to non- death related losses (e.g. loss as a result of illness, loss of a job, friendship, and divorce).

This activity may be completed during groups, individual counseling or therapy, at home, and in professional training sessions. It is best suited for use after several weeks have passed since your loss. The activity can be repeated months after the initial creation of a Palette of Grief® (e.g. 3, 6, and 14 months). Retain for reference and comparison of reactions.

Contraindications for Use

This activity should not be completed when a person has recently experienced a loss and is acutely feeling intense reactions.

Materials

Each person completing the activity needs: 5 different colored markers; 1 *Palette of Grief*® sheet; 5 lists of grief reactions (e.g. emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, and spiritual); and the *Understanding Your Palette* page.

Instructions

- **Time Required:** Approximately 45 minutes.
- **Group Size:** No limit to number of participants. Groups can be divided into subgroups of two or more, depending upon size of larger group. Every person must have enough time to share a completed palette.
- **Physical Setting:** Room must have tables for each person to have a place to support his or her work.
- **5 Markers:** Place markers in center of table. Each person must have five color markers to choose from. Each color will represent 1 of the 5 grief reactions.
- **1 Palette of Grief® Sheet:** Sheet looks like an artist's palette. Write words any way you want within the border of the palette. You can write words small or large and arrange them as you like; just stay within the palette.
- **5 Lists of Grief Reactions:** Each list contains words that refer to emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, and spiritual grief reactions.
- **1 Understanding Your Palette Page:** This page will give you the opportunity 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 grief process. Keep the Palette of Grief® page in front of you. This is the page with the picture of the palette. You will only need to look at one grief reaction page at a time. Start with the list of emotional reactions.

There are 5 steps to completing a palette. Proceed to Step 1, *Emotional Reactions* and follow instructions.

Step 1—Emotional Reactions

To begin, choose one color marker. “*ONLY*” use this color for your emotional reactions. Only change markers when you progress to another sheet of grief reactions.

Using the marker, check off the “*Emotional*” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page.

First, look at the *Emotional Reactions* page. Start from the top of the page and review the list of emotional grief reactions. If at any time since your loss, you felt any of the emotions listed, write the word(s) “inside” your palette.

Every palette is unique. You may have only one word written down or several.

Once you have completed looking over the list and writing the words inside your palette, put down your marker.

Step 2—Cognitive/Thoughts

The second step: Pick another marker to represent your thoughts. Check off the “Thoughts” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page. You now have two boxes check in two different colors. Next, take out the “*Cognitive Reactions*” page. If you thought of any of the words on this cognitive/thoughts list due to your loss, write the word(s) inside your palette. When you have completed reviewing the list, put down your marker.

Step 3—Behavioral Reactions

The third step: Choose a different marker to represent behavioral reactions. Check off the “*Behavioral*” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page. Note that you will now have three different colors in each of the three boxes.

Next, take out the “*Behavioral Reactions*” page. If you conducted yourself in a certain way since your loss, write those words inside your palette. When you have completed reviewing the list of how you have acted, put down your marker.

Step 4—Physical Reactions

The fourth step: Select a different color marker. Check off the “*Physical*” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page. This color represents the way your body reacted because of the loss you suffered.

Next, take out the “*Physical Reactions*” page. If you experienced any reactions because of the loss in your life, write those words inside your palette.

Step 5—Spiritual Reactions

The fifth step: Choose a different color marker to represent your spiritual reactions. Check off the “*Spiritual*” box on top of the Palette of Grief® page.

Next, take out the “*Spiritual Reactions*” page. If you experienced any of the spiritual reactions listed on this sheet, write those words inside 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 on the deceased person
- I feel empty
- I am envious
- I have become estranged from my 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 guilty
- I am hateful
- I feel helpless
- 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 and yearn for the deceased
- 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 sad
- 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

Cognitive Reactions

- I have trouble accepting the death
- I am apathetic
- I avoid reminders of the reality of loss
- I have a negative attitude
- I feel as though 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, grief, identity)
- I criticize myself
- I dwell on one negative detail instead of the whole picture of what happened
- I am having trouble making decisions
- I deserve to be miserable
- I have difficulty making plans
- I don't believe it happened
- I am disorientated
- I don't belong
- I don't feel safe
- 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 (images)
- I have experienced hallucinations
- I deserve to be happy
- I am hyper-vigilant
- I idealized the person
- I am indecisive
- I have intrusive thoughts related to deceased
- I cannot let it out
- I jump to conclusions
- I think life without him/her 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 associated with 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 speculate on what should have been done
- I think about taking my own life
- I think more could have been done
- 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 think I did something wrong
- I feel worthless
- I have all-or-nothing thinking
- I think I am a failure
- I repeatedly ask "Why?"

Behavioral Reactions

- I try to stay active
- I look at photos
- I no longer want to be around others who have not experienced a loss
- I have become introverted
- I mistrust others
- I have been drinking alcohol
- My drug use is causing problems
- I am compulsively gambling
- I am compulsively exercising
- I am addicted to the Internet
- I am excessively organizing
- I am becoming sexually promiscuous
- I have become self-destructive
- I am spending too much money
- I created an alter
- I am apologetic
- 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 have been careless and clumsy
- I am losing things
- I carry special objects
- I have changed my routine
- I have decreased activities
- I cry and feel tearful
- I am having 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 seek forgiveness
- I have become impatient
- I have become intolerant
- I am moody
- I neglect my responsibilities
- I have become overprotective
- I have outbursts
- I pace
- 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 search and call out
- I seek out places
- I have problems with sexual functioning
- I find myself sighing a lot
- I have sleep disturbances
- I am searching for clues
- I am socially withdrawing
- 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 items that belonged to deceased
- My work performance has changed
- I have been absent from work
- I am having conflicts with co-workers
- I am working too much
- I have a need to facilitate a support group
- I have a need to visit online message boards and 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 the 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 temporary hair loss
- I have headaches
- I have high blood pressure
- I frequently need to urinate
- 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 am easily startled by noises or touch
- I have stomach bloating or pain
- I have burning in the pit of my stomach
- I have a lump in my throat
- 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 have an unsteady voice
- I feel weakened
- I experienced changes in my weight
- My overall health has changed

Spiritual Reactions

- I have abandoned my faith
- I believe in an afterlife
- I created an altar
- I feel awakened by my experience
- I believe in angels
- I feel blessed
- I make mental affirmations
- I have experienced profound coincidences
- I am angry at God
- I believe that a loving God would never have let this happen
- I am apathetic about future
- I believe that death is a part of God's greater plan
- My beliefs are a source of great strength
- I feel blessed
- I have become cynical
- My loved one comes to me in my dreams
- I believe loved one is in heaven
- I believe loved one is in hell
- The deceased communicated with me through a psychic or medium
- I have sensed the presence of deceased
- I heard the deceased speaking to me
- I have detected the cologne/perfume of the deceased
- I have felt the presence of the deceased
- I saw the deceased for a moment
- I'm comforted by contact with deceased
- I'm frightened by contact with deceased
- I have continued the bonds with deceased
- I have difficulty attending place of worship
- I feel empty
- I feel enlightened
- I have a stronger faith
- 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 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 in my life
- I found meaning in what happened
- I question the meaning of my life
- I meditate
- I no longer believe in miracles
- I have difficulty moving on with life
- I need God's love more than ever
- I question why God let this happen
- I have re-evaluated my beliefs
- I create rituals that help me
- I have noticed objects move or disappear/reappear
- I search other faiths
- I search for proof there's life after death
- My sense of purpose in life has changed
- I no longer attend religious services
- I attend services more than I used to
- I enjoy singing hymns
- I can no longer praise God
- I question why people have to suffer
- I believe the world is a bad place

Understanding Your Palette of Grief®

After you have completed the activity, refer to the checked box on top of the Palette of Grief® page to remind you what each color represents. Your palette is a visual reminder of your grief reactions.

For example, if you have a particular color that stands out 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 grief has affected you spiritually. Notice words, shapes and prominence on the page.

Examine colors that stand out. You may have few words or be astonished by the number of words. Although you may be alarmed by the amount of reactions, focus on what the reactions are than the number of reactions.

Although this exercise can be enlightening, it can also be exhausting if you are not ready to explore those reactions. Be aware of your mood and how you are feeling as you examine your palette. If you are not feeling well, you may want to examine the palette at another time. After you complete the activity, keep a mental note of how you are feeling. If overwhelmed, stop the exercise. Focus on breathing and relax. Do a self-soothing activity.

When you feel ready, you can interpret your palette, or if you are in therapy, complete it with your therapist. As time passes, complete additional palettes and compare your responses.

Interpretation

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

- 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 they are too painful to write down?
- Looking at the palette, what does it actually mean about your grief?

- Would you rate your insight good, fair, or poor in understanding your grief reactions?
- Which three words on your palette are you comfortable discussing with others?
- Which three words on your palette are you “not” comfortable discussing with others?
- How would you explain your Palette of Grief® to someone who doesn’t know your story?
- How risky would it be to reveal and discuss your Palette of Grief® with a family member or friend?
- 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?
- Have you developed assertive communication and expressed to others how you feel about certain grief reactions.
- What relaxation skills do you have that help you to calm down when any of the grief reactions on your palette overwhelm you?
- How can you nurture yourself spiritually to cope with your grief reactions?
- How do your character strengths (e.g. hopeful, open-minded, self-control, love of learning) help you to cope with your Palette of Grief®?
- How has Internet websites helped you to cope with your grief reactions?
- Being that Palette of Grief® is only one creative way to explore your grief, what other ways have you expressed your feelings creatively (e.g. write in a journal, create a scrapbook, or write a letter).

Palette of Grief®: Positive Inquiry and Personal Narratives

1. What positive theme do you continue to see woven through your story?
2. What’s the constructive takeaway in how you talk to yourself about your story?
3. How does finding meaning in your narrative provide purpose in your life?
4. What strengths kept you positive during this struggle?
5. How can you apply what you learned during those difficulties and challenges to confident self-leadership?