

# Palette of Grief®

## A Reflective Practice for Processing Grief

### HERE'S WHAT'S INSIDE

- 100% self-paced and available on-demand Palette of Grief® activity.
- A big-picture view of common grief-related reactions after a traumatic loss.
- 50 practical strategies to adapt and cope with prolonged grief.

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Griefwork Center, Inc.  
P.O. Box 5177  
Kendall Park, NJ 08824  
732-422-0400

website: [www.griefworkcenter.com](http://www.griefworkcenter.com)  
email: [barbararubel@barbararubel.com](mailto:barbararubel@barbararubel.com)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/barbararubel/>



BARBARA RUBEL, BS, MA, BCETS, DAAETS is a nationally recognized keynote speaker who motivates audiences to create wellness through a vicarious trauma-informed approach. Barbara has presented to over 1,000 organizations since 1991. She is a leading authority and award-winning author on managing burnout, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, moral injury, vicarious trauma and traumatic loss. Barbara received a BS in psychology and a MA degree in community health, with a concentration in thanatology, both from Brooklyn College. Thanatology is a multi-disciplinary field dedicated to understanding grief and bereavement. Three weeks before Barbara gave birth to triplets, her father, died by suicide. Her story was featured in the Emmy award-winning documentary, *Fatal Mistakes, Families Shattered by Suicide*. As a Board-Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress and Diplomate with the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, Barbara gives audiences practical wellness strategies to manage their stressful careers. Barbara is the co-author of, *Living Blue: Helping law enforcement officers and their families survive and thrive from recruitment to retirement* (2024) and is the author of, *But I Didn't Say Goodbye: Helping Families After a Suicide* (3ed). She wrote four editions of the 30-hour CE healthcare course, *Loss, Grief, and Bereavement: Helping Individuals Cope*, Elite Learning, and is the reviewer for the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Barbara wrote the CE course, *COVID-19 Loss, Grief, and Bereavement*, and co-authored the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVCTTAC) Training Curriculum, *Compassion Fatigue*. She is a contributing writer to *Thin Threads*; *Fresh Grief*; *Coaching for Results*; and *Keys to a Good Life*. You have seen Barbara's work in Newsweek, Good Housekeeping, Family Circle, Health, Shape, FOX Business, and TODAY. Barbara created a reflective tool, Palette of Grief®, to give bereaved individuals key insights into managing their grief. For thirty years, the tool has become a standard in the field of thanatology and has reshaped the way clinicians approach and support a bereaved individual, offering solace and understanding in times of profound loss.

## FOR THE CLINICIAN

What if you could quickly be aware of a client's grief process without requiring them to verbalize the specifics of the loss narrative? It can be daunting when a client asks you for help to manage their grief. You may find yourself thinking, "I've never been trained in providing bereavement support." That's why I created Palette of Grief, a tool that provides effective, safe avenues for the discovery of the impact of grief symptoms. Imagine meeting a new client and having the skills to quickly adapt to their grief and visually understand their emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and religious or spiritual reactions. Palette of Grief gives you a big-picture view where you are immediately familiar with your client's grief process, which can improve clinical outcomes. Whether shared in person or as a take-home handout, this tool transcends barriers, providing individuals with a symbolic representation of the grief process. Allow flexibility for customization based on individual needs. Grief is a highly personal experience, and tailoring the tool to specific circumstances can enhance its effectiveness. Also note, that several factors can shape a Palette of Grief [pg 14]. My background as a thanatologist—a specialist in bereavement, mourning, and grief, has enabled me to develop a tool that meets the needs of the bereaved and those clinicians who support them. My understanding of the grieving process and contemporary grieving models inspired the creation of the Palette of Grief.

## WHERE DID THE IDEA OF THE PALETTE OF GRIEF COME FROM?

My father died by suicide three weeks before my triplets were born. One sleepless night, a few weeks after his death, I awaited the stirring of my newborns by immersing myself in a watercolor painting of flowers. An accidental spillage of water on my painting melded the vibrant colors into a mess. This unanticipated moment illuminated for me how grief, much like those intermingling hues, can intertwine. The Palette of Grief visually captures grief reactions through words and color and creates an image, like an artist's palette. When the palette is applied to grief, it blends emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, religious, or spiritual reactions after a final separation, which can spur a deeper picture of grief. For artists, a palette holds and blends a range of paint colors; in the domain of loss, it holds and blends grief.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

This activity should not be completed if you have recently experienced a loss and are acutely feeling intense reactions or are clearly confused. The activity is intended to be completed several weeks following an initial loss and can be repeated several weeks or months after the initial creation of a palette. Consider retaining it for reference and comparison of reactions. This exercise may be completed during a support group, counseling, therapy, or a professional training session.

**Supplies:** You will need at least five color markers for each of the reactions to grief.

## LET'S GET STARTED: STEPS 1 – 5

Reflect only on one loss experience. Start with Step 1, emotional reactions [pg. 4].

Step 1—Emotional Reactions. First, choose one color marker for your emotional reactions. Color chosen:\_\_\_\_\_. Review the list of emotions [pg. 4]. If you experienced any of the words after your loss, write them inside your palette [pg.14]. If your breathing has changed or your pulse rate is increasing, *take a break*.

Step 2—Cognitive/Thoughts. Next, pick a different color marker to represent cognitive reactions. Color chosen:\_\_\_\_\_. Review the list of cognitive reactions [pg. 5]. If you experienced any of the words after your loss, write them inside your palette [pg.14]. Take a break as needed.

Step 3—Behavioral Reactions. Select a different color marker to represent behavioral reactions. Color chosen:\_\_\_\_\_. Review the list of behavioral reactions [pg. 5]. If you experienced any of the words after your loss, write them inside your palette [pg.14]. Take a break as needed.

Step 4—Physical Reactions. Choose a different marker to represent physical reactions. Color chosen:\_\_\_\_\_. Review the list of physical reactions [pg. 6]. If you experienced any of the words after your loss, write them inside your palette [pg.14]. Take a break as needed.

Step 5—Religious/Spiritual Reactions. Choose a different marker to represent religious/spiritual reactions. Color chosen:\_\_\_\_\_. Review the list of these reactions [pg. 6]. If you experienced any of the words after your loss, write them inside your palette [pg.14]. Take a break as needed.



## COLORS OF LOSS

### *EMOTIONAL REACTIONS*

**Emotional reactions** are personal complex mental reactions that impact how you feel, behave, and think after a loss.

I felt abandoned.  
I felt agitated.  
I was aggravated.  
I was angry.  
I was anxious.  
I was apathetic.  
I felt betrayed.  
I was bewildered.  
I felt blame/I blamed someone for the death.  
I felt contempt.  
I became cynical.  
I felt despair.  
I felt detached from others.  
I was disgusted.  
I felt empty.  
I became distant from others.

I was fearful.  
I was frustrated.  
I was grateful.  
I felt guilty about what I did or did not do for the deceased.  
I felt helpless.  
I felt incomplete.  
I felt jealous.  
I felt lonely.  
I felt intense longing.  
I felt lost.  
I feared I was losing my mind.  
I was unable to experience a positive mood.  
I was emotionally numb.  
I felt nervous.  
I was overwhelmed.

I felt panicky.  
I was pessimistic.  
I was puzzled.  
I felt reckless.  
I felt relief.  
I refused to believe they were dead.  
I felt rejected.  
I felt sad.  
I had self-doubt.  
I felt shame.  
I felt emotionally shocked.  
I had shut down.  
I was worried.  
I felt worthless.  
I had an intense yearning for the person who died.  
I was unable to feel joy.

## ***COGNITIVE REACTIONS***

**Cognitive reactions** are the mental actions that influence your actions by acquiring knowledge and understanding through your perception, thinking, and memory.

I had difficulty accepting the death.  
I avoided reminders.  
I had a negative attitude.  
I was absentminded.  
I blamed myself.  
I had brain fog.  
I thought I was going crazy.  
I was closed-minded.  
I had trouble concentrating.  
I was not in control.  
I was confused.  
I criticized myself.  
I had trouble making decisions or plans.  
I was disorientated.  
I was forgetful.  
I had a desire to join them.

I jumped to conclusions.  
I had difficulty focusing.  
I kept focusing on “what if” and “if only”.  
I could not make decisions.  
I had learned negative things about the deceased that changed my view of them.  
I had nightmares.  
I was oddly aware of things related to death.  
I often thought about how short life is.  
I was outraged.  
I attempted to make sense out of what happened.  
I think a part of myself has died.

In disbelief, I didn’t accept that they were dead and avoided it.  
I wondered what should have been done.  
I revised my life goals.  
I thought of them all the time.  
I had unwanted pictures in my head.  
I repeatedly ask, “Why?”  
I thought that society devalued my loss, and so I was getting less sympathy.  
There is a disturbing aspect of the death that I am having difficulty managing.

## ***BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS***

**Behavioral reactions** are the way you express your emotions through certain actions or functions.

I stay in bed more than usual.  
I bit my nails.  
I called out to the deceased.  
I carried special objects.  
I felt tearful.  
I wasn’t functioning.  
I consumed more alcohol.  
I increased my drug use.  
My eating habits changed.  
I gambled more.  
I increased my Internet surfing habits.  
I became impatient.  
I lost things.  
I no longer trusted others.

I depended on caffeine and/or nicotine to regulate my mood and energy.  
I listened to music.  
I visited online bereavement message boards/chat rooms.  
I organized all the time.  
I looked at the photos.  
I procrastinated.  
I was preoccupied with thoughts and memories.  
I became quiet.  
I neglected responsibilities.  
My work performance changed.

I had difficulty with relationships.  
I was restless.  
I became a risk taker.  
I had changed my routine.  
I sought out certain places.  
I became self-destructive.  
I had a hard time reading.  
I searched for clues.  
I treasured certain items.  
I worked out at the gym more than ever before.  
I screamed in the car.  
I had outbursts.

### ***PHYSICAL REACTIONS***

**Physical reactions** are when your brain releases chemicals and prepares your entire body to respond to a loss, which impacts breathing, digestion, metabolism, circulation, and respiration.

I had aches/pains.	I lost my energy.	I had a peptic ulcer.
I felt muscle tension.	I was exhausted.	My sexual desire has changed.
I had cold chills.	I trembled.	I had hot flashes.
I had chest pain or heartburn.	I had “jelly legs.”	I had skin problems.
I was restless.	I had difficulty catching my breath.	I had increased hair loss.
I felt rundown.	I had frequent colds.	I was frequently thirsty.
I felt intense pangs of separation distress.	I had new food allergies.	I had eye strain.
I felt shaky.	I had butterflies in my stomach.	I felt dizzy.
I was easily startled by noise/touch.	I had stomach bloating or pain.	I grit my teeth.
I had the same symptoms as the deceased.	I was nauseous.	I cleared my throat more.
I had worsening eczema.	I had a dry mouth.	I had a lump in my throat.
		I had trouble swallowing.
		I had sleep disturbances.

### ***RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL REACTIONS***

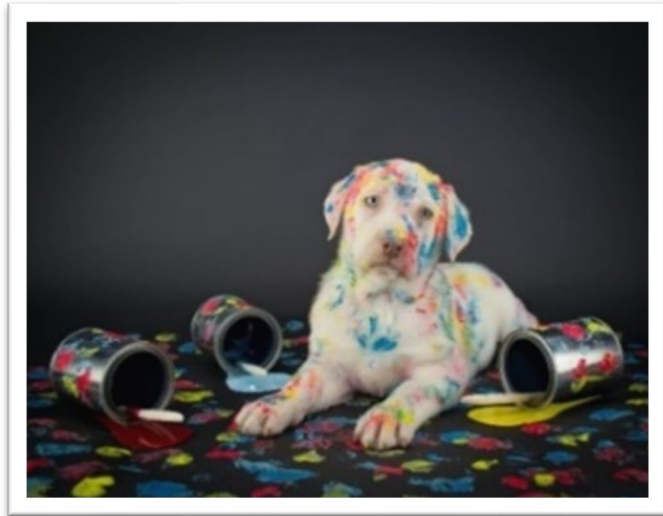
**Religious reactions** are your response to loss based on organizational beliefs and practices in your faith. **Spiritual reactions** are your practices in response to loss guided by your values, relationships, and life purpose.

I was angry at God.	I had difficulty attending a place of worship.	I had difficulty moving on.
I felt God’s grace.	I no longer believe in miracles.	I continued the bonds with the deceased.
I didn’t understand why God did not heal them.	My beliefs were a source of strength.	I created an altar.
I felt judged by God.	I felt awakened by my experience.	I created a memorial.
I didn’t think God cared about me.	I felt an inner peace.	I had profound coincidences.
Loss is a valuable lesson from God.	I believed in karma.	They sent me messages.
They are in heaven/hell.	My life was meaningless.	I had detected their smell/cologne.
I search for proof of life after death.	I found meaning.	I heard their voice.
I abandoned my faith.	I meditated.	They came to me in a dream.
I had a stronger faith.	I felt hopeless.	I felt forsaken.
I found comfort through prayer.	My sense of purpose had changed.	I used my experience to help others.
I felt their presence.	I created rituals that helped.	I questioned why people suffer.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS AFTER COMPLETING A PALETTE OF GRIEF

You've completed the five steps.

- If a specific color prominently stands out on your Palette of Grief, what emotions or reactions does it symbolize for you?
- Reflecting on your palette, which three words or emotions do you feel most comfortable discussing openly?
- If there's a word on your palette that elicits discomfort, consider the significance behind that particular word. How do you plan to address the emotions associated with this word?



These questions aim to delve deeper into the nuances of grief, encourage self-reflection, and provide an opportunity to articulate your emotions more comprehensively. After you have answered the above questions, move on to *50 Ways to Cope with Colors of Loss* [pg. 7]. First, notice which color stands out and what that color represents. Then focus on intervention strategies to cope with those specific reactions. If you would like to explore other intervention strategies to cope with other grief reactions, continue reading.

## 50 WAYS TO COPE WITH COLORS OF LOSS

Coping with loss is a deeply personal experience, and different strategies resonate with different individuals. Here's a list of coping strategies to consider based on your grief reactions:

### Intervention Strategies to Cope with EMOTIONAL Reactions

Grieving is an emotional journey. When the palette of emotions takes center stage, navigating through the intensity becomes crucial. Managing overwhelming emotions requires practical coping strategies. Consider these approaches for moments when overwhelming emotional pain takes precedence:

1. **Metaphors.** Use a metaphor to compare your grief to something, or use an analogy to explain in more detail (e.g., riding a roller coaster, walking through mud).
2. **The Power of Writing:** Write about your thoughts and feelings in a journal. Write poetry or a letter to the person who died. Keep a grief diary to monitor your feelings and the points in the day when grief was at its highest intensity. As you review past entries, you can see how you have processed and integrated difficult emotions and how your loss narrative has changed over time.
3. **Stressors and Triggers.** Be self-aware of objects, sounds, smells, places, or certain people that spark a negative reaction. In time, with repeated exposure, as you confront the reminder, the intensity may lessen.

4. **Self-Regulation.** To calm yourself, focus on adjusting your temperature just like it was a thermostat. Focus on reducing the intensity and the frequency of an impulse. Pay attention to the way that you talk to yourself.
5. **Maintain Boundaries.** Identify your motivations for maintaining your limits when others expect too much. Learn to say no in order not to be overwhelmed.
6. **Keep Your Sense of Humor.** Laughter is a coping mechanism. Humor is emotion-focused coping. It can alleviate stress in the moment. Share a funny story about the person who died, but don't make a joke about yourself or use humor to aggressively hurt others.
7. **Self-Compassion.** Be kind to yourself. Other people are going through similar experiences. Keep it all in perspective. Show yourself the same kindness you would show someone else. Notice your head position and body posture. If your body collapses forward and you find yourself looking down, raise your chin and lengthen your spine to lift yourself up.

### Intervention Strategies to Cope with COGNITIVE Reactions

If you notice more cognitive reactions on your palette, these reactions can become a focal point in the grieving process. Managing overwhelming thoughts requires practical coping strategies. Identify and challenge negative thought patterns by focusing on tangible approaches that help you regain control over your thoughts and cultivate a sense of calm amidst the chaos of grief:

8. **Flexibility.** Use mental energy to solve a problem. Although it is not easy to shift your attention when bereavement robs you of your energy, you can control your thinking by contemplating solutions to the problem. To support emotional resilience, change your thinking about what is going on in the moment by accepting what is, contemplating alternative views, and adapting accordingly. Incorporate flexibility into your day by playing a board game or doing a puzzle.
9. **Attitude of Gratitude.** The way you manage loss is based on your goals, values, beliefs, perceptions about your world, and your past experiences. One way to change your attitude is to focus on gratitude. Identify your motivations for remaining grateful. Make a list of things you feel grateful for having in your life.
10. **Realistic Optimism.** Realizing that you can't change what happened, you see things as they are. Although it is not what you want, you are trying your best. Where realism is your view of the facts related to loss, optimism is your confidence to handle the challenges you face.
11. **Learning.** Understand the difference between grief, bereavement, and mourning to manage loss. Read about grief or listen to podcasts about coping with life stressors.
12. **Stay Motivated.** Consider your best interests and what motivates you as you match your goals for the day. Without motivation, it is difficult to act.
13. **Identification.** You may have an unclear sense of who you are now which can cause identity disruption. Being that you no longer have a role in the relationship that you shared, you can have an unclear sense of self. If you have thoughts that a part of yourself has died, consider who you are now and how your identity continues to intertwine with them.
14. **Cognitive Reframing.** Interrupt your harsh self-narrative by challenging your thoughts. Replace negative thoughts and the words you use to describe your loss and replace them with positive ones: "I'm alone in my grief" becomes "I'm not alone; others are grieving too."



15. ***Reinterpret Events.*** Consider alternative explanations for what happened. Ask yourself if there is another way to see the situation.
16. ***Seek Feedback.*** Talk to those whom you trust to gain a different perspective and insight into your thoughts about what happened.
17. ***Managing Intrusive Thoughts.*** Be self-aware of negative thoughts. Identify your motivations for problem-solving to increase the ability to manage reactions. If you think, “My life is empty without them,” then your feelings will likely reflect that thought. Separating thoughts from feelings is challenging. Explore ways to manage your thoughts, especially when your mind is racing, you feel preoccupied, or confused. If after a long period, you have a marked sense of disbelief and cannot accept that the person is dead, consider what you are avoiding.
18. ***Reconstruction.*** Perhaps you’re hearing negative messages in your head like, “I should be getting more done” or “I should be better by now.” Notice any thoughts that create a negative feeling. Some thoughts – like despair and emptiness – are hard to tolerate and lead to uncomfortable feelings. Change the way you think by reconstructing these messages into, “It’s OK to feel whatever I’m feeling because there’s no set-in-stone way to feel when grieving.”
19. ***Goal Setting and Time Management.*** Be accountable for a realistic short-term achievement. Prioritize what is important. Be consistent as you reflect on what needs to be done to achieve your goal.

## Intervention Strategies to Cope with BEHAVIORAL Reactions

If you notice more behavioral reactions on your palette, your grief leans toward the behavioral. When behavioral reactions take center stage, understanding them as a form of communication is key. Behavioral reactions are a language of their own, expressing the intricate nuances of grief. As you recognize the potential for behavioral reactions to become unhealthy coping mechanisms, consider any of the following strategies:

20. ***Facing Tangible Reminders.*** Transform avoidance into empowerment by proactively facing reminders. Create a structured schedule to gradually confront and process the emotions associated with souvenirs, mementos, and keepsakes. Emphasize the importance of reconnecting with family, friends, and the community for support.
21. ***Linking Items.*** Harness the therapeutic power of belongings by displaying or sharing certain items associated with the person who died. Wearing a sentimental item can serve as a tangible and comforting connection, aiding in the grief process.
22. ***Accepting Support.*** Recognize the significance of connection and safety. Overcome feelings of loneliness by leaning on loved ones, friends, and professional support. Attend a bereavement support group or consider seeking guidance from a grief counselor.
23. ***Ignoring Support.*** Some people say the wrong thing, offer misinformation, are uncomfortable talking about feelings, or want you to get over it. Some individuals may struggle with expressing empathy or providing meaningful support. Encourage open communication about feelings and educate others on effective ways to offer comfort.
24. ***Spend Time at an Animal Shelter.*** Volunteer at an animal shelter as a therapeutic outlet to walk a dog or socialize a kitten. Channeling your energy into helping animals can provide a positive and uplifting experience.

25. ***Honor the Person Who Has Died.*** Commemorate your loved one's birthday with acts of kindness, such as volunteering or creating a scholarship fund in their name. Engage in volunteer work to foster a sense of connection and purpose.
26. ***Memory Quilt.*** Transform cherished clothing items into a tangible memory quilt, waving together fabric such as t-shirts, jerseys, and jeans. Creating a physical representation of memories can be a comforting and creative outlet.
27. ***Prioritize Emotional Self-Care.*** Cultivate self-awareness in nourishing your body and mind. Engage in activities such as enjoying a healthy meal, getting a massage, or immersing yourself in soothing music.
28. ***Avoid Addictions.*** Recognize the importance of seeking professional help when negative coping mechanisms, such as alcohol, drug use, overspending, or binge eating become a concern. Prioritize healthier alternatives to manage emotional pain.
29. ***Create a Memory Jar.*** Foster a sense of shared remembrance by inviting others to contribute their cherished memories. The memory jar serves as a heartfelt reminder, allowing you to revisit uplifting moments whenever needed.
30. ***Limit Media.*** Reduce exposure to distressing news and emotionally charged TV.

## Intervention Strategies to Cope with PHYSICAL Reactions

Physical reactions can significantly influence well-being. Targeted interventions become essential to address the physical facets of grief. Recognizing and attending to your body's needs during the grieving process forms the cornerstone of holistic well-being.

31. ***Pursue Interests.*** You may have difficulty moving on or thinking about the future. If you are unable to plan, make sure that you are engaging in regular activities.
32. ***Get More Physical Activity.*** Harness the healing power of movement by incorporating physical activities. Identify personal motivations for engaging in physical activity (e.g., walking, exercising) as a means of processing loss and staying healthy.
33. ***Relaxation Skills.*** Alleviate bodily tension through relaxation techniques (e.g., breathing, yoga). Cultivate a mindful awareness of your body's responses and actively work towards physical relaxation.
34. ***Moments of Awe.*** Foster emotional well-being by connecting with the beauty in your surroundings. Step outside to appreciate the sky, clouds, stars, trees, or the soothing presence of flowing water. Capture the beauty of nature through photography, creating tangible reminders of awe-inspiring moments.
35. ***Maintain a Garden.*** Establish a memorial garden or plant a tree in honor of your loved one. Gardening provides a therapeutic outlet and a tangible way to nurture living symbols of remembrance.
36. ***Do Something Creative.*** Channel grief into creative expression by embarking on art projects like a memory box or collage.
37. ***Go to the Doctor.*** Prioritize your overall health by seeking professional medical guidance when intense grief begins to manifest physically. Physical problems linked to grief may impact your well-being, and timely medical attention can prevent long-term health issues.

## Intervention Strategies to Cope with RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL Reactions

If you notice more spiritual or religious reactions on your palette, your grief leans toward the religious/spiritual. Recognizing the contours of grief colored by these reactions opens the door to intervention strategies that provide comfort, meaning, and strength. Here, we explore a palette of compassionate approaches designed to help you maintain your spiritual connection and navigate the intricate tapestry of grief. Nurture spiritual resilience by considering any of the following strategies:

38. **Meaning Making.** Engaging in the art of storytelling serves as a powerful tool for crafting a self-narrative that weaves meaning into the fabric of loss. By sharing your story, you can embark on a journey of self-discovery, challenging and reshaping assumptions about the world and your place in it.
39. **Values and Beliefs Anchoring.** Grounding yourself in core values provides a stable foundation during times of loss. Nurture this connection to find strength and guidance. Allow your beliefs to serve as a compass through the challenging terrain of grief.
40. **Create a Ritual.** Simple yet profound rituals, such as lighting a candle, offer a tangible means of expressing love and remembrance. These acts become symbolic bridges that connect the earthly realm with the spiritual, fostering a sense of continuity and connection.
41. **Cultural Self-Identity Exploration.** Delving into your cultural background (e.g., ethnicity, faith, race) can unveil a rich tapestry of bereavement practices that bring comfort and a sense of belonging during a time of sorrow.
42. **Scriptural Guidance:** Engage with sacred texts, scriptures, or spiritual teachings.
43. **Prayer for Strength.** Maintaining an intimate relationship with a higher power through prayer provides a sanctuary for solace.
44. **Generosity and Charity.** Expressing generosity by making a charitable donation in honor of your loved one channels grief into positive action. This act not only honors their memory but also contributes to a greater good, fostering a sense of purpose.
45. **Continued Bond.** Sustaining a spiritual connection with the departed involves reflecting on the wisdom they imparted. Consider the advice they would give and the values they cherished to provide a guiding light through the labyrinth of grief.
46. **Anticipating a Death Anniversary.** Acknowledging and preparing for anniversary reactions involves crafting a thoughtful plan weeks in advance. Spend this time in spiritual connection with the person who died to navigate the anniversary with grace and intention.
47. **Meditation and Mindfulness Practices.** Engaging in meditation and mindfulness cultivates a focused awareness of the present moment, allowing you to gain control over your thoughts and find respite amidst the chaos of grief.
48. **Guided Imagery for Healing.** Leveraging the power of imagination, the Palette of Grief® guided imagery exercise becomes a therapeutic tool for processing grief. Creating a calming mental landscape provides a space for reflection and healing.
49. **Sustaining Hope.** Recognizing that the permanence of separation may feel overwhelming, reaching out for support becomes crucial. In moments of hopelessness, calling a crisis line, such as 988, provides a lifeline to compassionate assistance.
50. **Dreams and Symbols.** Pay attention to dreams and signs that may offer spiritual insights, messages, or connections related to the deceased or the grieving process.

## FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE PALETTE OF GRIEF

- **Psychological Proximity.** Dependence and the depth and intimacy of the relationship.
- **Manner of Death.** Way a person dies is classified into causes (NASH): Natural-ordinary and expected; Accident- unintentional and unplanned; Suicide or a Homicide.
- **Age of the Deceased/Mourner.**
- **Responsibility and Accountability.** Number of people responsible, who hastened the death and ultimately responsible.
- **Place of Death.** Home, a long-term care facility, a hospital, a hotel.
- **Finding the Body.**
- **Method of Death Notification.** How you were informed about the death can significantly impact your initial response and subsequent grieving process (e.g., ED notification, at home, or phone notification).
- **Traumatic.** Distressing event with a personal impact interpreted in a way that overwhelms you.
- **Violent.** Caused by the use of physical force.
- **Sudden.** No period of preparation because the death did not occur over time.
- **Anticipatory Grief.** Emotional preparation leading up to a loss shapes subsequent grief.
- **Preventable.** Avoidable and unnecessary, issues of blame and culpability can develop.
- **Multiple Loss.** Simultaneous or closely spaced losses can prompt introspection: Do I grieve uniformly for all? Does one person's absence weigh heavier than another's? Might I postpone mourning for one while immersing in grief for another, or perhaps sidestep confronting one loss by immersing in the sorrow of another?
- **Untimely Death.** At an inopportune time or sooner than anyone had expected.
- **Unsuccessful Coping Response.** Positive coping: faith, humor, social support, finding solutions through problem engagement. Avoidance coping: blame others, deny the death occurred, or self-medicate.
- **Concurrent Stressors.** Health, environmental, relational, job, and online stressors.
- **Stability of Life.** Instability can be sparked by a lack of healthy relationships, financial problems, not being secure, or physically or emotionally well.
- **Secondary Losses.** Lost companionship, changes in routines, loss of a confidant, and loss of identity are the result of a primary loss.
- **Religion, Spirituality, and Culture:** Duration of reactions is expected based on beliefs and practices that structure behaviors and the way to express bereavement.
- **Ambiguous Loss.** Uncertain whether a person is dead or alive, cannot make sense of the situation (Boss, 2022). 1. Physical Presence/Psychological Absence: traumatic brain injury, dementia; or 2. Psychological Presence/Physical Absence: missing person).
- **Grief Style (pattern).** Grief patterns, whether intuitive or instrumental, are rooted in personality traits and cultural influences rather than gender distinctions (Martin & Doka, 2021). Can exhibit a combination of both patterns. Intuitive grievers: immerse deeply in emotions, manifesting grief through overt behaviors. Instrumental grievers: lean towards a cognitive processing style, eschewing overt emotional displays and instead channeling grief through proactive problem-solving and tangible actions.
- **Well-being.** Emotional, physical, occupational, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and financial factors.

- **Pre-Existing Trauma and Childhood Trauma.** Unmanaged Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (e.g., abuse, neglect, witness violence) may face higher well-being challenges as an adult.
- **Disenfranchised Grief and Perceived Support.** Cannot openly acknowledge a death; when it is not sanctioned by society; when mourning publicly is avoided; or when they don't feel supported (Doka, 1989). After a stigmatized death, grief can be disenfranchised due to a perceived lack of social support.
- **Attachment Style.** Pattern of behavior stems from how bonding with parents. Bowlby described four adult attachment styles: secure, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and disorganized, which influence relationships and how to manage loss. Infants grow into adults and their attachment-related patterns can be identified to loss.
  - *Secure attachment:* Infants with a secure attachment display distress upon separation from a parent. However, upon reunion, they actively seek and find comfort. Adults who experienced such nurturing as a child tend to navigate bereavement differently. They can acknowledge the loss and embark on personal growth, rather than feeling a loss of identity. Their inherent resilience often translates into enduring, healthy relationships, as they naturally gravitate towards seeking solace and support from loved ones.
  - *Avoidant attachment (dismissive attachment or anxious avoidant attachment):* Infants who experience this form of attachment tend to distance themselves when separated from a caregiver and remain indifferent upon their return. Such behavior can stem from inconsistent parental presence or an environment where the child feels overlooked. Growing up amidst this neglect, boundaries might have been blurred or nonexistent. As adults, these individuals often exude independence, maintain emotional barriers, and frequently believe they fare better in solitude. Lacking a foundational emotional bond, they steer clear of deep emotional dialogues, shun closeness or consolation, struggle to foster nurturing relationships, and seldom reveal their vulnerabilities. Their outward demeanor might suggest contentment, masking the suppressed emotions beneath.
  - *Anxious-ambivalent attachment (preoccupied attachment or anxious-ambivalent attachment):* Infants exhibiting this attachment style become profoundly distressed upon separation from a caregiver and often resist comfort upon reunion. Their insecurity stems from inconsistent caregiving. As adults, they grapple with profound challenges when faced with loss, finding it hard to sever the emotional ties with the departed. When grieving, receiving compassion from others can be a complex experience. Fears of abandonment and past wounds make them apprehensive and resistant to healing gestures. This lingering anger and fear can hinder their journey toward acceptance and moving forward.
  - *Disorganized attachment (unresolved trauma):* Infants with disorganized attachment exhibit unpredictable responses to separation from a caregiver, often appearing disoriented upon their return. Such behaviors can emerge from inconsistent or frightening parental interactions. As adults, adapting to unpredictable environments becomes challenging. Lingering unresolved fears and traumas can instill a lasting belief that relationships are inherently perilous. While they yearn for deep connections, the weight of their past might compel them to withhold their grief, distancing themselves from empathetic individuals. Amidst intense emotions, particularly in moments of sorrow, they grapple with their internal turmoil, often pushing away those who seek to offer solace.

