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Introduction

- Northern communities are connected like the different parts of a giant spider web. If something happens in one community, it can have an impact on other communities: **like when one part of a spider web is touched; the movement ripples through the whole web.**
- Community members are often part of extended families and have shared a space and a lifestyle for many generations. When a death or loss touches the community, the whole community is affected, like those parts of the spider web.
- Children and adolescents are part of that web. Their reactions will be influenced by their environment's reactions. They also contribute to the families' and the community's ways to deal with the loss.

Concept of Kinship in Inuit culture

A **spider-web** of relations. Extended families are interconnected circles based on wholeness with the strength of providing balance. They include social and religious functions. Within this worldview, kinship extends beyond human relationships to include kinship with the natural world. This ecological view of kinship categorizes social obligations such as reciprocity in relationship with plants and animals.

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Grief: What is it?

- Grief is the natural reaction to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when someone or something you love is taken away. There are many kind of losses:
 - Loss of a person
 - Loss of a way of living
 - Loss of a project
 - Loss of a relationship (separation)
 - Loss of health
 - Loss of a sense of safety after a trauma
 - Etc.

Today's presentation is focussed on grief following the loss of a person.



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Grief:

A process part of life, framed by socio-cultural environments

- Death and losses are part of life. Grieving is also an experience most of people will go through.
- Every culture, society, or community frames its own ways of dealing with grief through rituals, ceremonies, ways to honor, and ways to remember.
- Yet, some circumstances make it more difficult or challenging to go through the process that allows one to overcome the pain and to continue functioning in daily life despite the grief.

APA, 2012; Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001.

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Grief

Suna una inuttitut?

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A plurality of ways to grieve

- How people grieve depends on many factors, including meaning of the loss, personality, life experiences, coping style, faith, culture (which frames socially legitimate ways to express grief). For children and adolescents, the grieving process is influenced by the stage of development.
- It also depends on available resources (including social network)
- The ways to express emotions, sadness for example, **vary** between individuals, families, communities and cultures. It is influenced by rules and norms about the expression of emotions that are learned in childhood.
- Inuit have been portrayed as stoic. At times, the dominant culture has wrongly represented Inuit as if they were without feelings. This shows a lack of recognition of people's sense of loss, need to mourn, or ability to do so.
 - What would you say are expressions of grief nowadays in Nunavik?



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A plurality of ways to heal

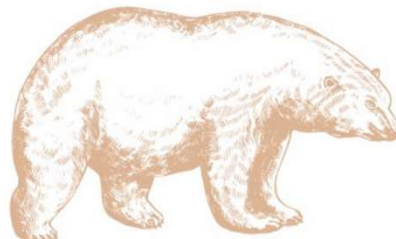
- It is important to take into consideration the different dimensions of the situation in which the grief take place to assess the fragility and capacity of adaptation towards the loss:
 - Individual dimension
 - Family dimension
 - Community dimension
- Children's and adolescents' grieving and healing processes are in resonance with their family's processes of grieving and healing, as well as with their community's reaction to this loss. For adolescents it can also be in resonance with their friends reactions.
- Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried: **There is no normal duration for grieving. Societies give some frame for the grieving process.**
- There are no good or bad emotions while grieving. It is normal to be confused and to feel different emotions during that time. What is important is to recognize when someone needs help.

Castellano, 2008

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A plurality of ways to support people in the process of grieving.

- Ways to express support towards people in the process of grieving usually include some form of presence.
- But this presence may take different forms, with a more or less important use of words and/or gestures.
- The social medias are bringing another dimension where people share and express their emotions. They can play the role of solidarity network, support network (Jérôme, Biroté & Coocoo, 2018)



(APA, 2012; Briggs, 2000b)

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How would you say Inuit in Nunavik grieve?
 Are there different ways between children adolescents,
 adults, elders?
 What are Nunavik 'values and practices' in healing?

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Some particular types of grief

- When we anticipate the death of a loved one because of a terminal yet slow illness, we have time to prepare emotionally. It can also lead to premature separation and withdrawal.
- Special occasions such as a holiday, birthday, etc. can bring back the memory of the lost one and trigger an acute grief reaction
- When there is a persistent form of intense grief in which maladaptive thoughts and dysfunctional behaviors are present along with continued yearning, longing and sadness and/or preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the person who died, we talk about **complicated grief**. The bereaved person often feels lost and alone. Grief continues to dominate life and the future seems bleak and empty.



Zisook, 1995

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Normal thought patterns

- **Disbelief** - This is often our first thought upon hearing of a death, especially if the death was sudden.
- **Confusion** - This manifests as having trouble concentrating, being forgetful, experiencing confused thinking.
- **Preoccupation** - We may spend lots of time thinking about the deceased or obsessing about their suffering and dying.
- **Sense of the Deceased's Presence** - This is most likely to happen shortly after the death.
- **Spiritual phenomenas** - It is a fairly common and normal as a manifestation of grief to see or hear a loved one, usually within a few weeks of death. People from Western culture may tend to think of it as a hallucination, but for some it is a highly spiritual phenomenon.

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Stages of grief

Traditionally, we talk about the 5 stages of grief :

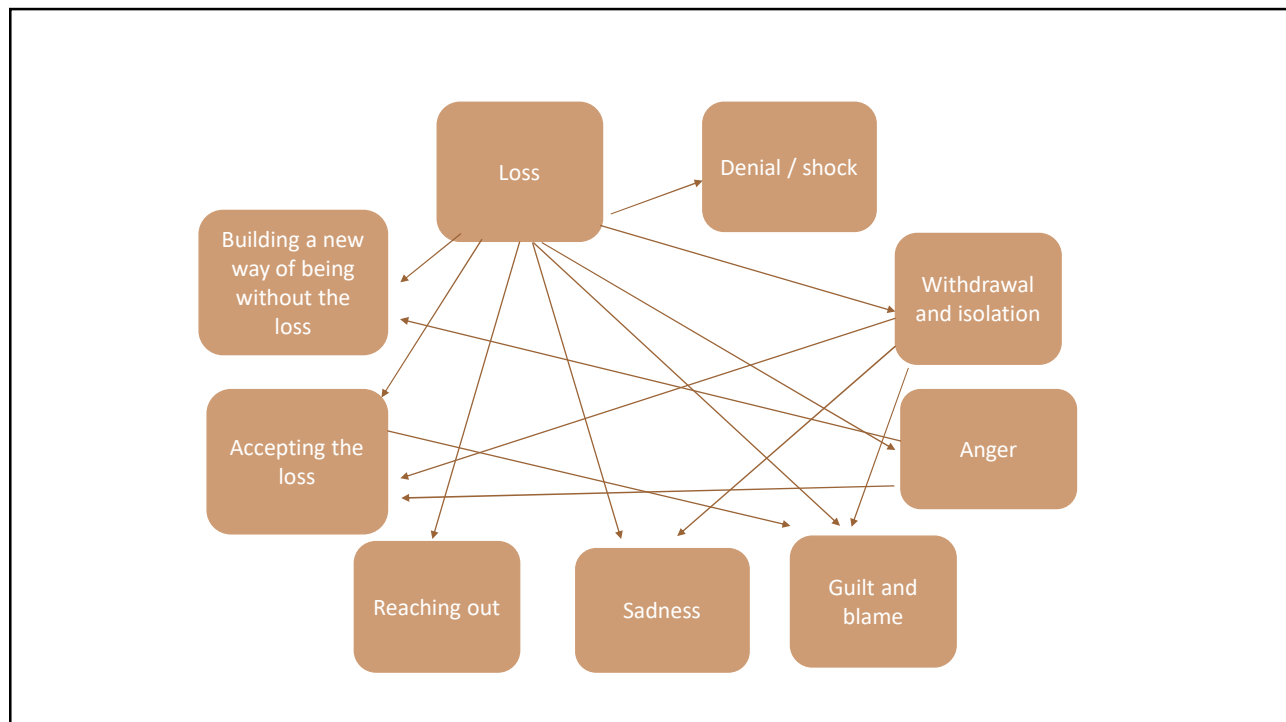
- 1- **Initial shock / Denial** : "This can't be happening to me"
- 2- **Anger** : "Why is this happening? Who, what is to blame?"
- 3- **Bargaining** : "If I do this, maybe ..."
- 4- **Sadness** : "I am sad because I long for..."
- 5- **Acceptance** : "I am in peace with what happened"

It is possible sometimes to go back to one stage: it is not always linear!

It is also possible that someone may not go through all the stages.

Kübler-Ross, 1969

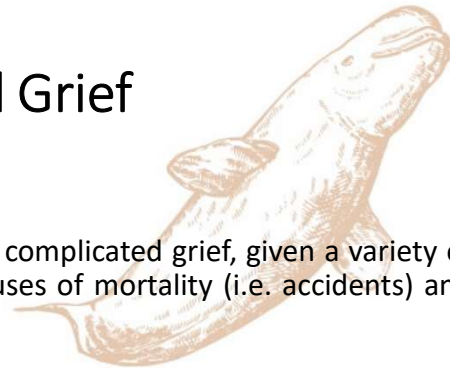
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Complicated Grief

- Inuit populations may be at increased risk for complicated grief, given a variety of factors, including increased rates of some causes of mortality (i.e. accidents) and deaths by suicide.
- Inuit also have a past history of multiple stressors resulting from the effects of colonization and forced assimilation, a significant example being residential school placements, which impacts the grieving process.



Wesley-Esquiaux & Smolewski, 2004; GreyWolf, 2011; Spiwak et al., 2012

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Complicated Grief: Symptoms

- Intense sorrow, pain and rumination over the loss
- Extreme focus on reminders of the loved one OR excessive avoidance of reminders
- Problems accepting the death
- Numbness or detachment
- Feeling that life holds no meaning or purpose
- Lack of trust in others
- Inability to enjoy life or think back on positive experiences with your loved one
- Trouble carrying out normal routines
- Isolation from others and withdrawal from social activities
- Experience of depression, deep sadness, guilt or self-blame
- Belief that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death
- Feeling that life isn't worth living without your loved one: Wish you had died along with your loved one

Most common reactions for children

Isolation
Insomnia
Fear of being alone
Agitation
Loss of motivation

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Historical traumas and grief

- **Historical trauma** : The collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations. If not resolved, those traumas are passed from generation to generation
 - Impacts of historical traumas are similar to grief: sadness, anger, confusion, difficulties to trust, etc.
- **Disenfranchised Grief** : Grief that people experience when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged or publicly mourned. Disenfranchised grief results in an intensification of emotional reactions such as anger, guilt, sadness and helplessness.

Recognition that grief does not only extend to the loss of immediate nuclear family members in the current generation. It also includes loss of ancestors and extended kin as well as animal relatives and traditional languages, songs and dance.

Castellano, 2010; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004

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Children and youth's responses to loss

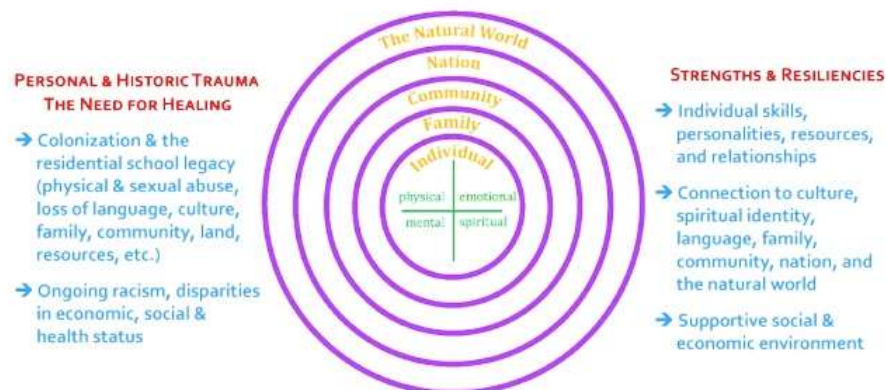
- Children can show little reactions to loss and feel the effects later on during their development
- They can manifest indifference, anger or have behaviours issues instead of expressing sadness. Their behaviours can be unpredictable and unusual.
- Children, even older ones, can feel abandoned if they lose a parent, and can manifest hostility or fear of losing the other parent.
- Children who are in the phase of their development where everything is about them are at risk of believing the situation is their fault.
 - < 2 years old : general distress, loss of speech
 - < 5 years old : bedwetting, encopresis, difficulty eating and sleeping,
 - School age: social difficulties, isolation, hypochondria, phobias
 - For teenagers, reactions are similar to adult's reactions.

Zisook, 1995

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A holistic approach of grief and healing

Figure 1: Holistic Healing = Restoring Balance⁵

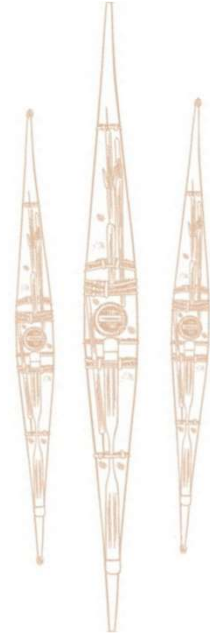


Castellano, 2008:387–388

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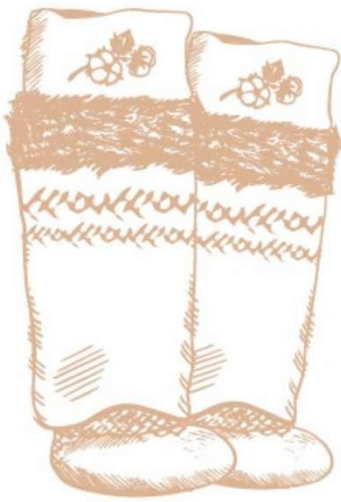
How to support

- Talking about grief is difficult (also for the workers). When intervening with someone experiencing grief, you will first need to make sure that those component are in place:
 - **Physical safety** : Make sure to chose a place where the person feels safe and comfortable yourself too)
 - **Affective safety** : Before talking about grief, does the person feel supported, accepted?
 - **Cultural safety** : To address the healing needs of Inuit people, it is important to ensure culturally appropriate interventions.
 - **Spiritual safety** : make sure the person has the space to live their spirituality and not feel judged.



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How to support



Taking care of the different dimensions of the person's life:

- **Physical** : Helps the person be grounded and be in the present
- **Emotional** : Helps to express and externalize emotions, to release tensions and stress
- **Mental** : Helps to organize and create perspective
- **Spiritual** : Helps to reconnect with the spiritual

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How to support

- In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman (1997) wrote about the role of connecting with others as essential to healing: The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within this context.
- The connection with the lost love one can continue positively through good memories.
- Culture protects individuals and communities during times of crisis, such as during periods of bereavement: Encourage traditional healing through the community : communal grief rituals, storytelling and very importantly: **Art**
- The inclusion of **arts and culture** can counter some of the damages associated with Canada's history of outlawing and suppressing traditional arts, ceremonies, dances, and rituals.

Herman, J. (1997).

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Do you have examples of Inuit grieving rituals?

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How to support

- Help people grieving to accept how they feel : As people look for answers and understanding, they will be confused and experience many emotions. Help them accept how they feel. **Every one reacts in their own way; it is best not to compare yourself to others.**
- Encourage community and family activities that make sense for the person / the family : Can you give examples of activities that Inuit like?
- Help the person connect with extended kin networks to support identity formation, sense of belonging, recognition of a shared history and survival of the group.
- An important form of support that hospitals can offer is to let family members bring in traditional food that will comfort the dying person.

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How to support children and youth

- It is important to explain to them, in words they can understand, the loss, and help them understand it is real and definitive (younger children might not yet have the capacity to understand that it is definitive, we need to follow their rhythm). Also, it is important to answer their questions, as much as we can, and to ensure they know they are not to blame.
- **As much as adults do, they too need rituals (funeral or else)**
 - Importance of routine: Make sure that they sleep enough and that they eat at regular hours.
 - Make sure they are in a place where they feel safe and comfortable.
 - Discourage negative adaptation strategies (drug, alcohol, going out too often, working too hard).
 - Identify sources of support and give support to parents.
 - Encourage the expression of needs.
 - Use already known adaptation strategies.
 - Plan activities that they like (physical exercise, berry picking, fishing, going on the land, etc.).
- And very importantly: take care of yourself as an intervener (talk with colleagues, do things that you like to do after work, take breaks at work...)

Kelly, 2010 ; Kelly & Minty, 2007

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