

Building a New Normal

Working With Grief, Creating
Connections, Deriving Empathy

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Kara

Kara Overview

- Non-profit providing emotional support for grief and end-of-life since 1976
- Peer support: individual counseling & group (donation only)
- Grief-related therapy (for fee)
- Support for youth and families
- Camp Kara (ages 6-17)
- Support for Spanish Speakers
- Crisis Response
- Community education and professional training
- Clients include: individuals, families, professional and family caregivers, first responders, organizations (schools, agencies, businesses, corporations)
- Contact: 650-321-5272; kara-grief.org

Fundamentals of Grief

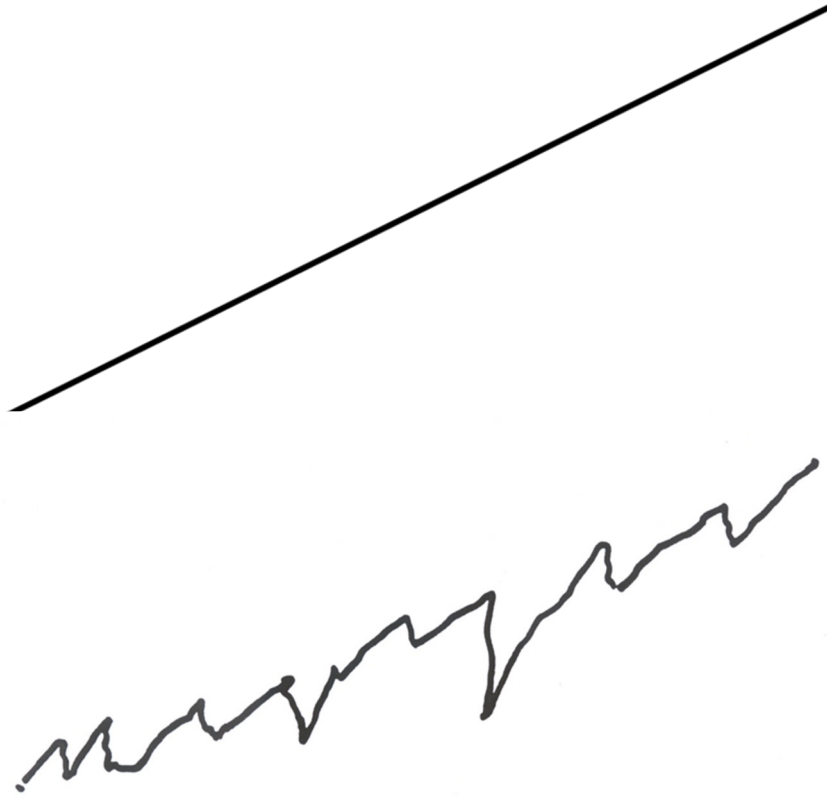
“I’M HOPELESSLY IN LOVE WITH A MEMORY
AN ECHO FROM ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE”
- MICHAEL FAUDET

*“ Each person’s **grief** is as **unique** as their **fingerprint**. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be **witnessed**. That doesn’t mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to **be fully present** to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining.”*

-David Kessler

Grief

- The process for resolving loss or change
- Resonates
 - Socially
 - Physically
 - Mentally
 - Spiritually
 - Emotionally



Grief is a spiral of feelings and reactions

It is not a line with a beginning and an end

This roller coaster of emotions is often heightened by triggers or landmines.

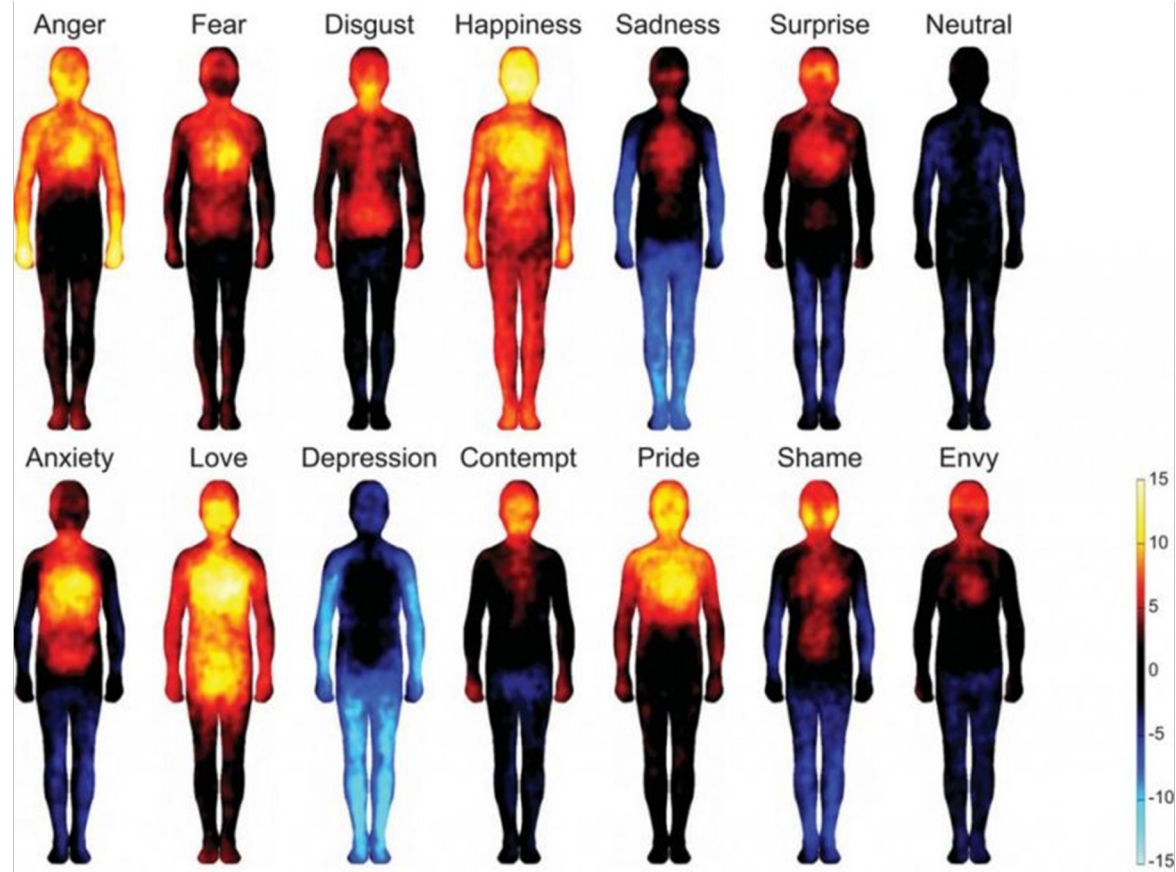
- Sensory Triggers
- Memory Triggers
- Time Triggers

Grief knows no time



The body
remembers in
ways we may not
expect.

**Intrinsically Connected
-Mind-Body-Heart-**



Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hieten, "Bodily Maps of Emotions," *Proceedings of the National academy of Science* 111, no.2 (January 2014): 646-651, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1321664111>.

Factors Affecting the Grief Process

- Age of the griever and the one who died
- Anticipated vs. Sudden Death
- Cause of Death
- Nature of the relationship between griever and deceased
- Griever's support system
- Griever's mental & emotional health

Grieving Styles

Intuitive

- **Feelings** are intensely experienced
- Expressions such as crying and suffering mirror the inner experience
- Successful adaptive strategies facilitate experience and expression of feelings
- Prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate and disorganization and disorientation
- Physical exhaustion and anxiety may result

Instrumental

- **Thinking** is predominant to feeling as an experience; feelings are less intense. There is a general reluctance to talk specifically about feelings
- Mastery of oneself and the environment are most important
- Problem-solving as a strategy enables mastery of feelings and control of the environment in creating the new normal
- Brief periods of cognitive dysfunction are common- confusion, forgetfulness, obsessiveness
- Energy levels are enhanced and symptoms of general reactions to the loss go unnoticed.

The Backpack Effect

- Present grief can tap into grief that has occurred in the past
- All our grief meets in the moment of our present loss or trauma.
- What may help is to identify what has been brought up from the past- realizing it may have as much emotional impact as the present.

Facts and Myths about Grief

If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss

REALITY: Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

Facts and Myths about Grief

The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.

REALITY: Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

Facts and Myths about Grief

It's important to be “be strong” in the face of loss

REALITY: Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to “protect” your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

Facts and Myths about Grief

Grief should last about a year

REALITY: There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving. How long it takes can differ from person to person



Your Caring Presence

Providing Support for Others Facing Crisis



The Power of Empathy



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

- Be Honest with yourself about your own thoughts, concerns and feelings
 - Judgments may arise about
 - The situation/ incident
 - Their reactions
 - Our own ability to serve/ help your child
- When in doubt be curious
 - How is that for you?
 - What's coming up for you right now?
 - Am I intruding? / Would you like someone to talk to?
 - What do you need? / What can I get for you?
 - What's been the most difficult for you?
 - When is the hardest time of day?
 - Can you tell me more about that?

- **Say something, rather than nothing**

- When you are responding to a person facing a crisis situation, be sure to use statements such as:
 - I feel..... I believe.... I would want/ need.... I acknowledge....
- Be careful of statements that may not give the person the opportunity to express his/her own unique needs and feelings
 - You should/ shouldn't... I know just how you feel...
 - Everything will be ok. Don't worry, be sad, cry, be angry (etc.)
- Gently acknowledge the loss, rather than ignoring it.

- **Stay in the present as much as possible**
 - Why is this important?
 - All our grief meets in the moment of our present loss or trauma, and it can be overwhelming to sit with our past.
 - Grief is eternal and is the price for having loved. Acknowledge their past, yet do not linger on it if uninvited.
- Questions to ask to help stay in the present:
 - **What do you need right now?**
 - **What would be the best support for you right now?**
 - **How is that for you right now?**

- **People in crisis need to know they have decision making power**
 - Grief is disorienting, for it marks a time of change and/ or loss.
 - Out of Control ----- Control
 - Isolation ----- Community
 - By restoring decision making power (however small or large) you are in essence restoring their sense of control

- **Listening is profound healing.**
 - Know that you CAN make a difference
 - **You don't have to make it better**
 - **You don't have to have the answers**
 - **You don't have to take away the pain**
- It's their pain. One has to experience it in one's own time and in one's own way



“We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don’t really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. ... The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.”

- Pema Chödrön





Thank you!

