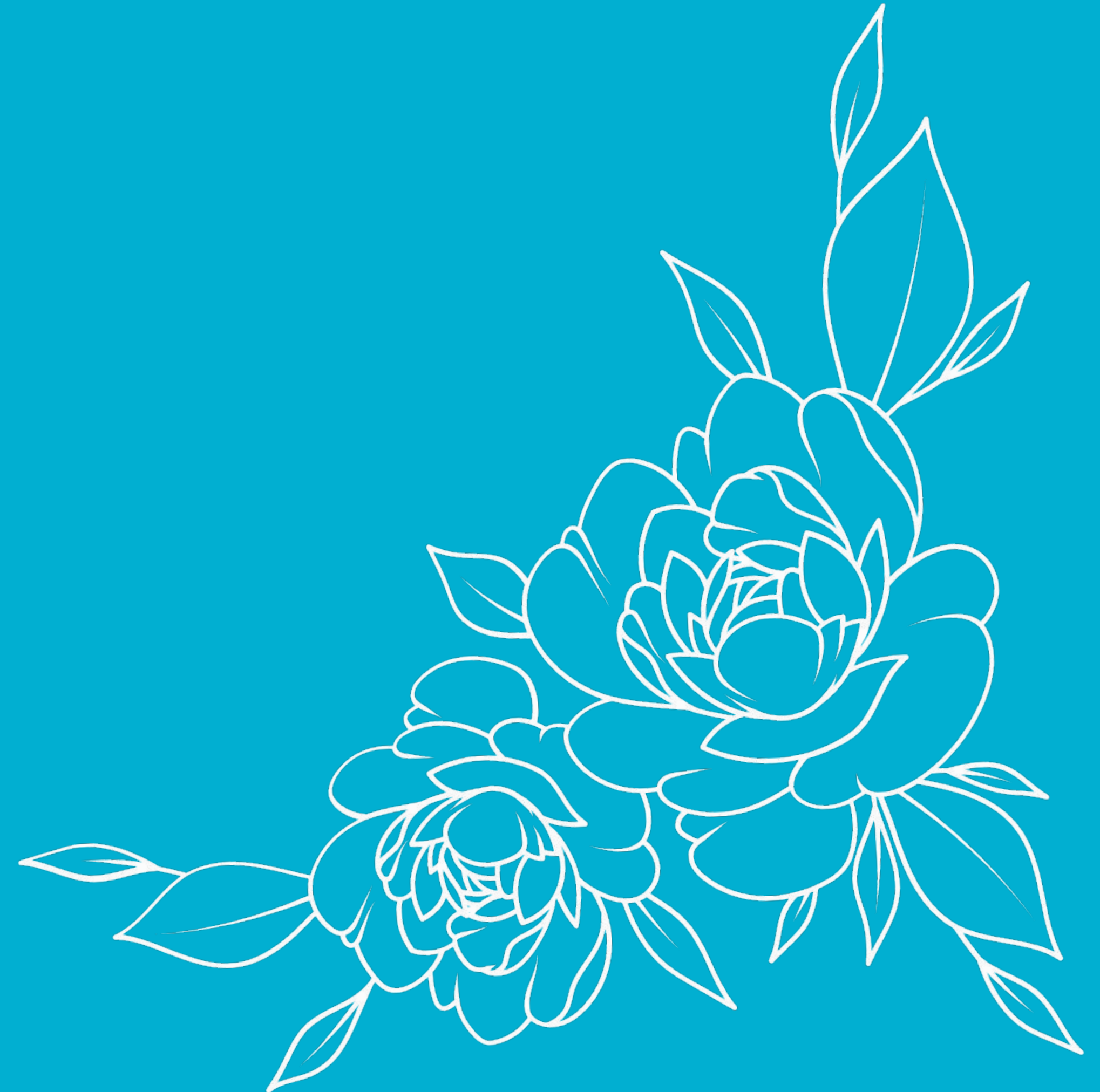


Tender Hearts: Understanding and Supporting Children Through Grief



Patti Broadfoot, RSW





TODAY

- What is grief?
- Grief and Children
- Developmental differences
- Strategies
- Resources
- Q & A

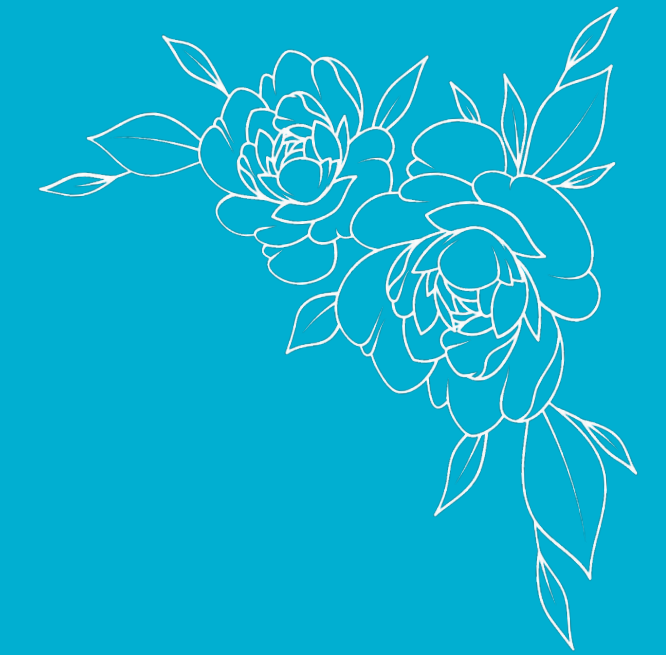


Pause

- *Prioritize you*
- *Take what you need*
- *Reach out if you need support*



Grief Literacy

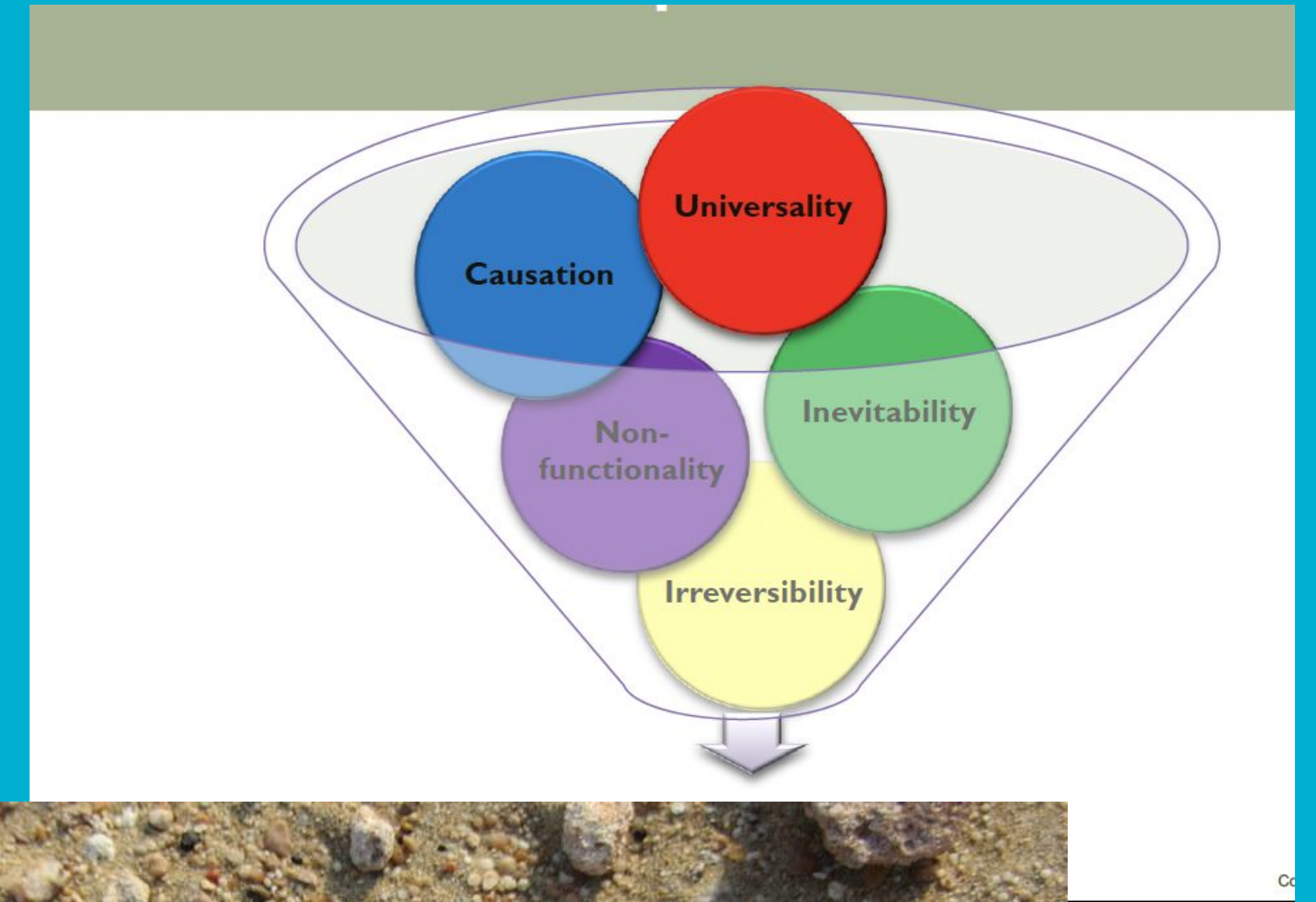


What is Grief Literacy ?

Why is it Important?



What was your first experience with loss?



Let's Talk Grief

What is Grief?

What is Loss?





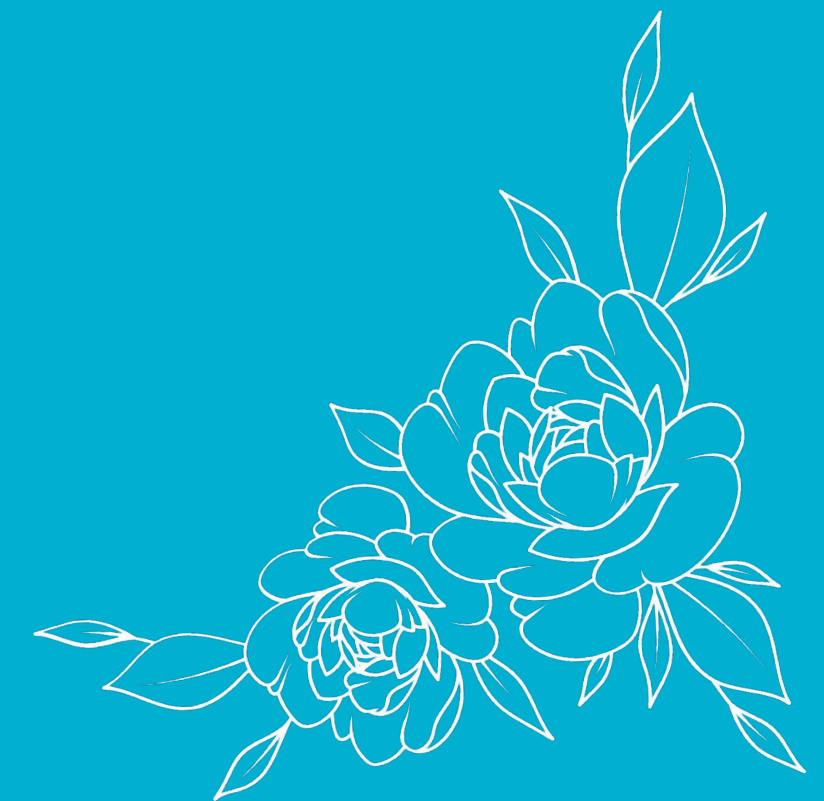
Loss is what YOU say it is

- Death of friend, family, pet
- Separation / divorce
- Loss of job
- Retirement
- Chronic illness diagnosis
- Disability
- Bankruptcy
- Investment losses
- Life transition (empty nest)
- Change of personal beliefs
- Natural Disasters
- Moving
- Loss of Safety
- Loss of connection
- Loss of dreams
- Loss of trust
- Loss of Independence
- Loss of role within the family
- Loss of friends
- Loss of abilities
- Loss of role
- Loss of identity
- Loss of security
- Change in relationship
- Sense of belonging
- Loss of faith
- Loss of wages
- Self-worth
- Health
- Loss of contro
- Quality of life
- Loss of extracurricular activities
- Loss of normalcy
- Loss support systems
- Loss of hope
- Loss of chosen lifestyle
- Loss of future
- Loss of patience
- Loss of humour
- Loss of ability to focus and function
- Loss of health
- Quality of life
- Loss of control
- Loss of confidence
- Loss of the ability to travel
- Loss of intimacy
- Loss of independence



Types of Grief

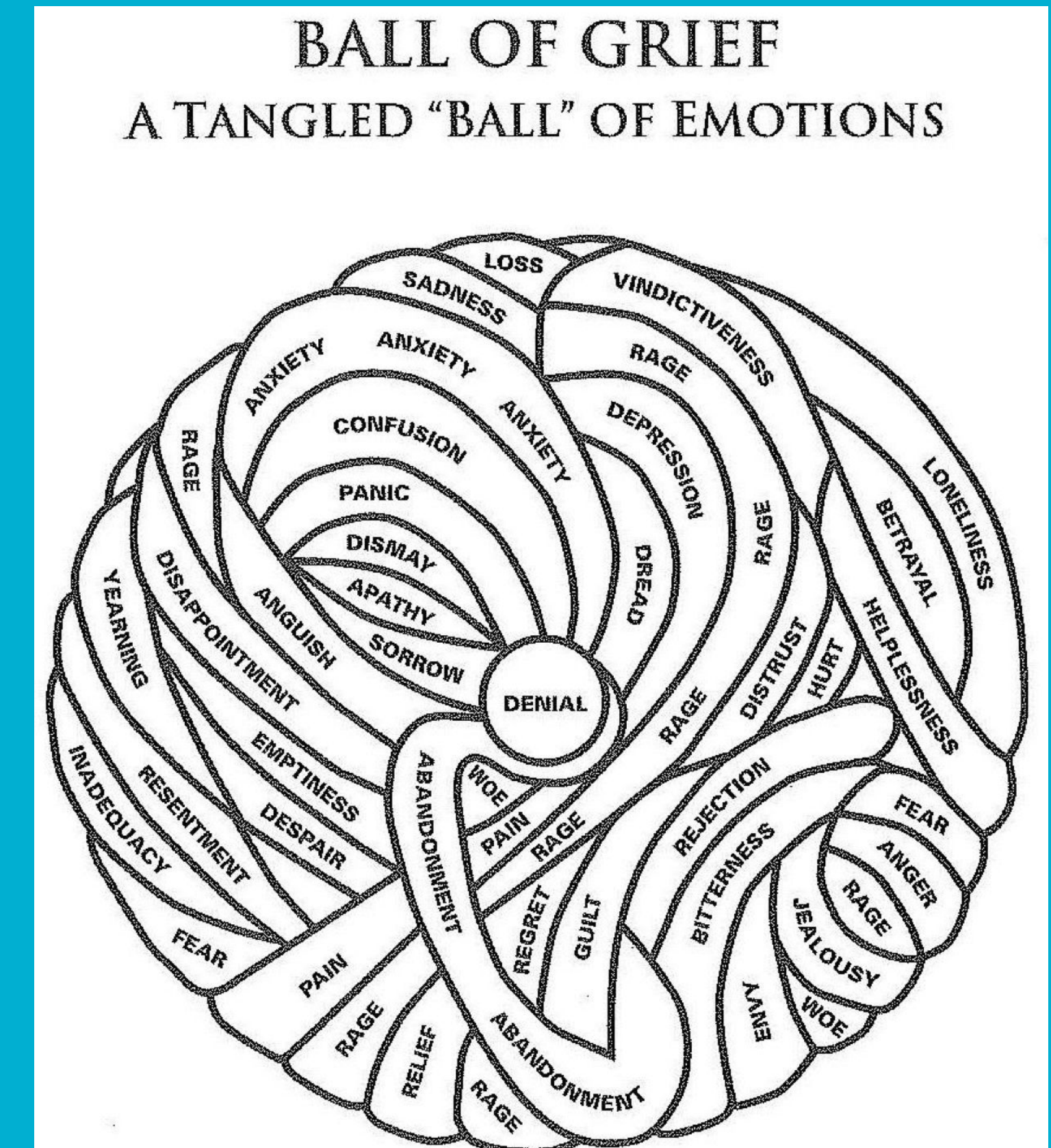
- **Anticipatory grief** (Lindemann, 1944)
 - Feelings of loss felt before it happens (loss of independence, decline in health)
- **Ambiguous loss** (Boss, 1970s)
 - Someone is physically gone but psychologically there (kidnapping, war, natural disaster)
 - Someone is psychologically gone but is physically there (foster child, dementia)
- **Cumulative grief** (Horowitz)
 - Several losses in a short period of time
- **Disenfranchised grief** (Doka, 2008)
 - Grief is not openly acknowledged or socially supported
- **Other experiences creating complexities with grief**
 - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Secondary or vicarious grief, compassion fatigue





Impacts of Grief

- Emotional
 - Wide range of emotions
- Physical
 - Tightness in chest, gastro issues, cognitive changes, dizziness, extreme fatigue, foggy thinking, heat ache, over sensitive to noise, physical pain
- Spiritual
 - Questioning beliefs, exploring beliefs, challenging your beliefs, creating new beliefs
- Social
 - Lack of connection, withdrawn, loneliness, wanting to be around someone 24/7



Brain Development

Limbic System

Main Functions:

- Emotion regulation
- Survival
- Formation and storage of memories
- Motivation and behavior

Children

- Highly active & reactive
- Emotional regulation - forming
- Supports development of attachment

Brain Stem

- Controls basic life-sustaining functions
- One of the 1st parts to develop
- Primitive reflex
- Works with limbic system



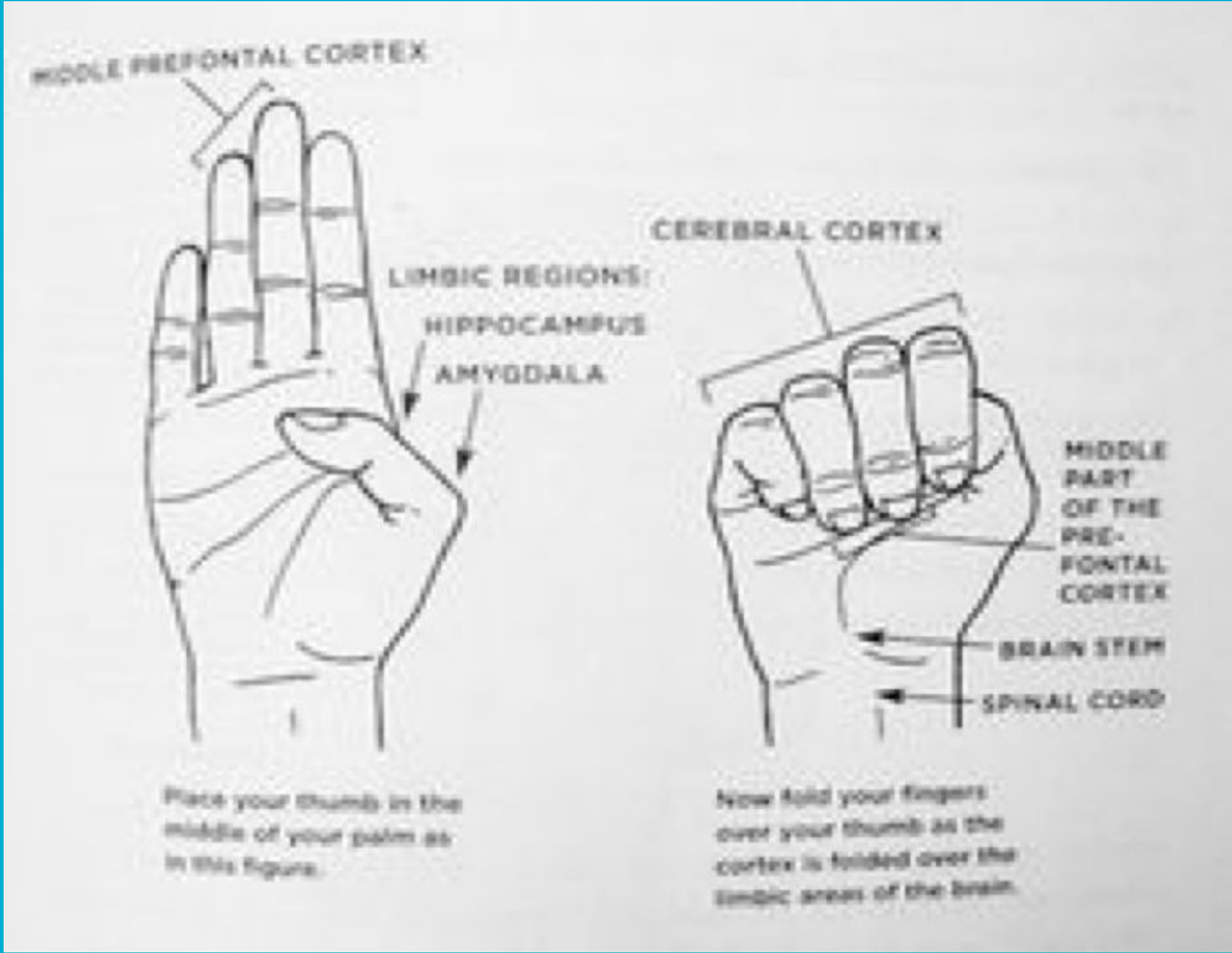
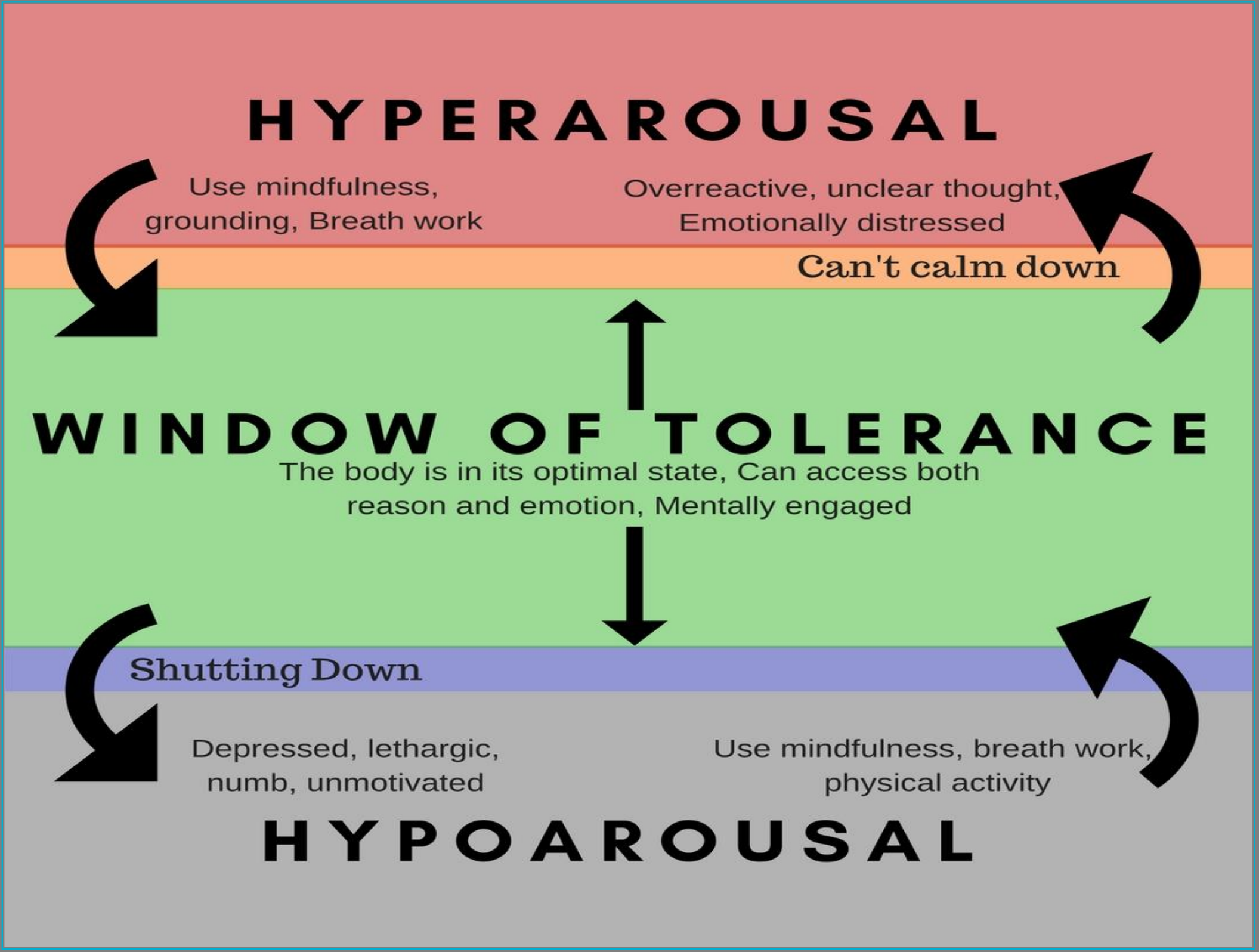
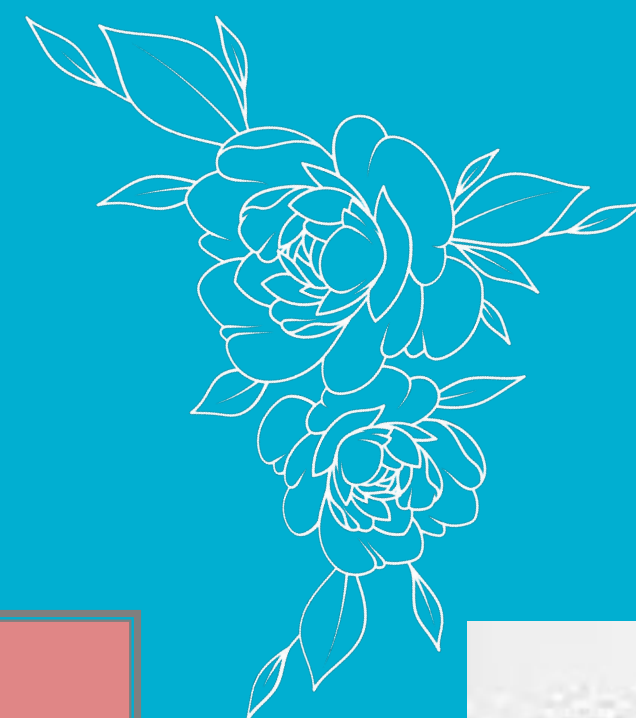
PreFrontal Cortex

- Main Functions:

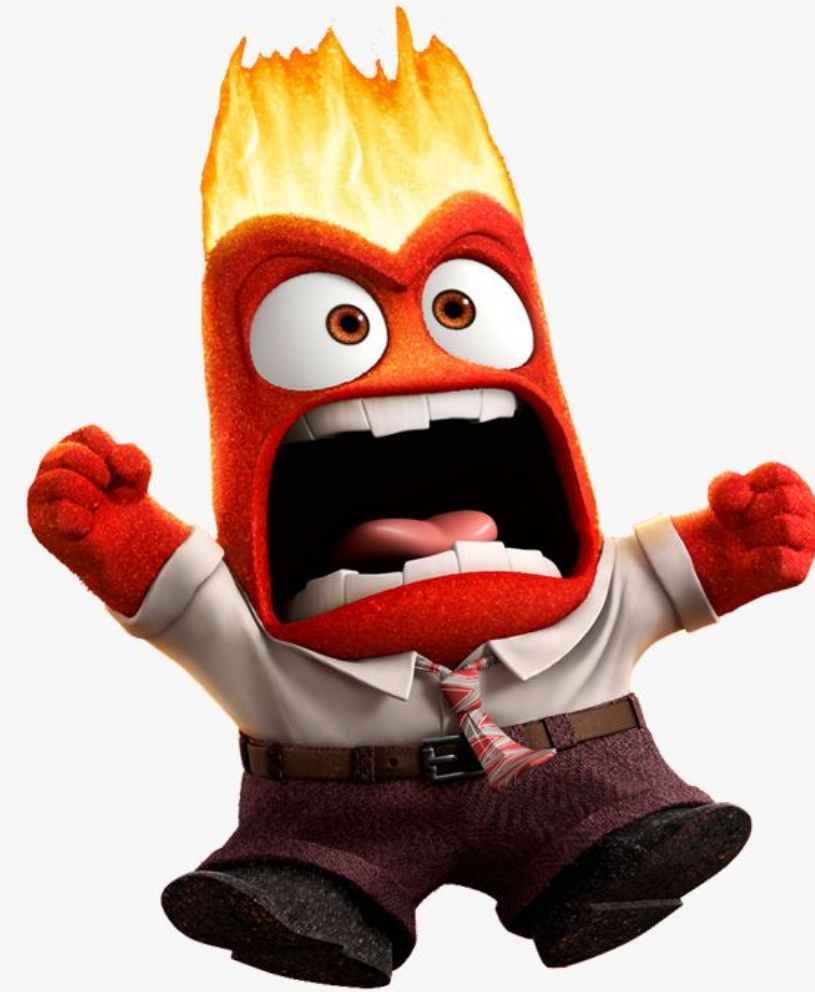
- Decision-making
- Impulse control
- Emotion regulation
- Focus and attention
- Social behaviour
- Working memory
- Executive Functioning

- **Development:** The prefrontal cortex is one of the last areas of the brain to fully develop, not maturing until the mid-20s.

Window of Tolerance & Flipping your Lid



“Difficult” Emotions



- Normalize
- It's ok to feel sad, mad, scared
- Feelings are trying to help

Children & Grief ...

The Why



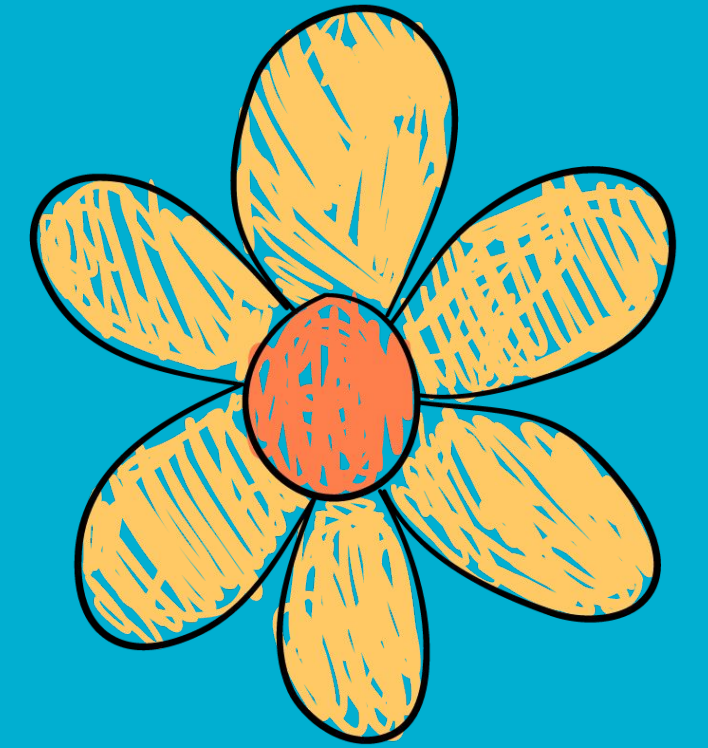
- 1 in 14 children in Canada lose a parent or sibling by age 18.
- 62% of children experience the death of a close family member by age 10.
- 90% of youth report experiencing the death of a family member or friend by the end of high school.
- 20.6% of single-father families result from the mother's death
- 23.4% of single-mother families result from the father's death
- Grieving youth face higher risks of negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and suicide.

What's missing?

- pet loss
- teacher loss
- friend loss
- divorce
- moving
- and so much more

(Canadian Census, 2016, Ens & Bond, 2005, Paul & Vaswani, 202)

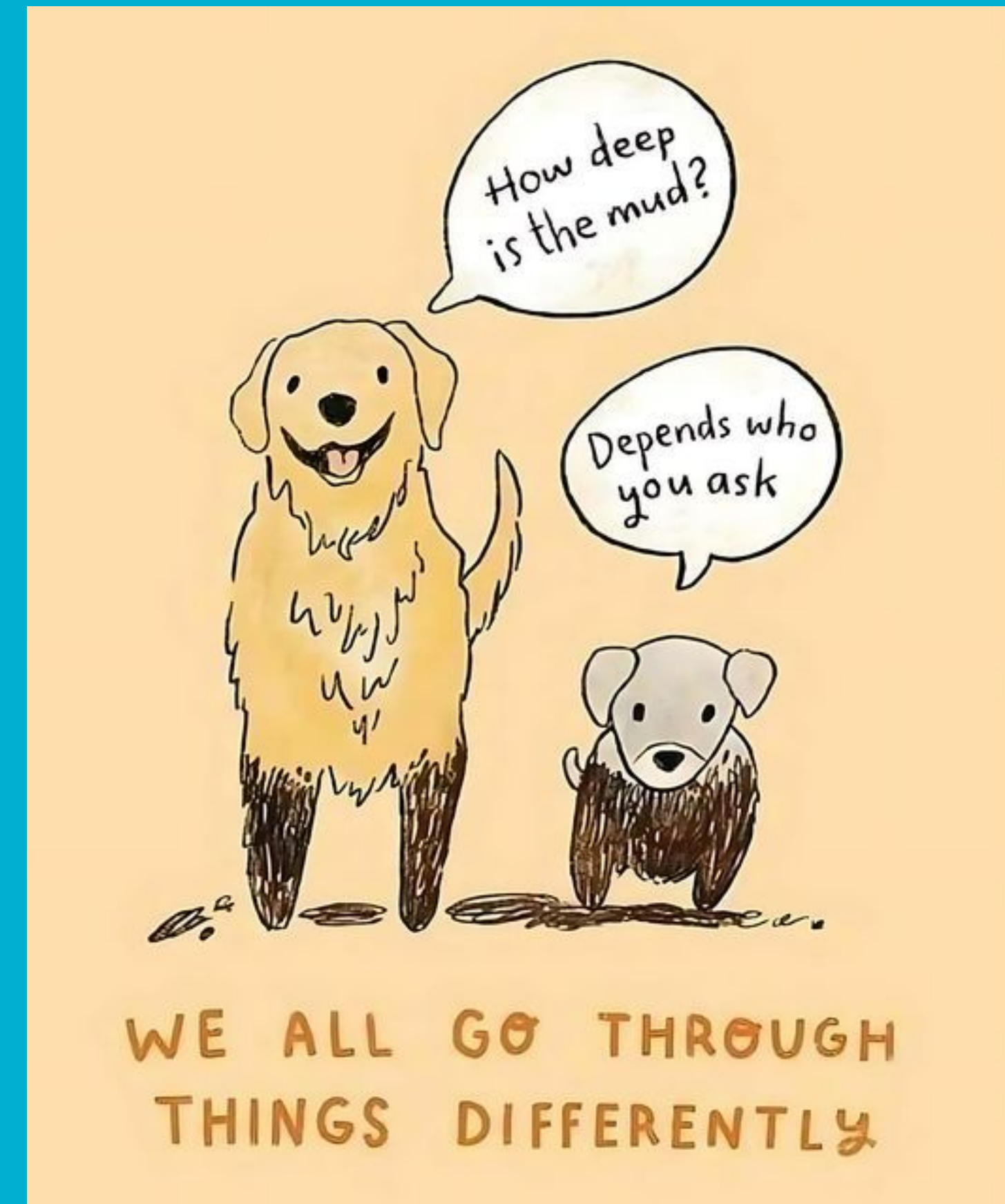
Myth or Truth



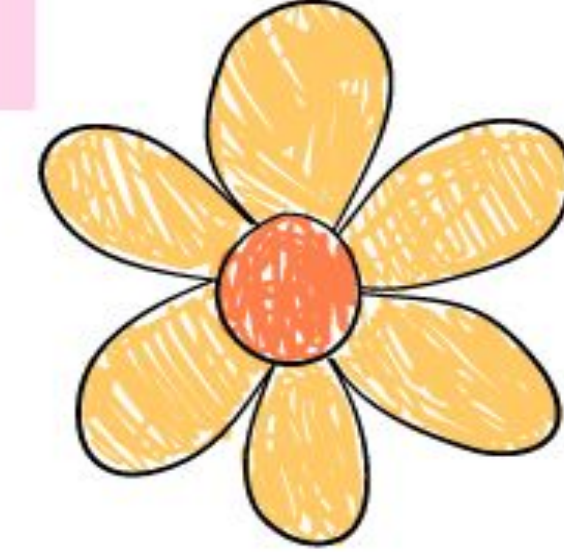
- Children don't understand death; therefore, they don't grieve.
- It's better to shield children from loss.
- Children should not be at the bedside, or at the funeral
- If the child isn't talking about it we shouldn't tell them
- Better not to talk about it, the child will focus on the event and saying something wrong will harm them.
- Children are resilient and will bounce back
- Children get over loss quickly
- The death of a loved one is the only major loss that children and adolescents experience
- Helping children deal with loss is the responsibility of the family.

Kids and Grieve

- ReGrief
- Puddle jumping
- Regression
- Influenced by adults
- Don't have the language
- Often experience sleep disturbances
- Often experience separation anxiety
- Often see it through their play (more aggressive, playing out the death)



5 C'S OF CHILDREN'S GRIEF



1. Did I **CAUSE** it?
2. Can I **CATCH** it?
3. Could I have **CURED** it?
4. Who is going to take **CARE** of me?
5. How can I stay **CONNECTED** to the person?



Understanding Grief in Infants/ Toddlers (0-2 yrs)



- Understanding of Death

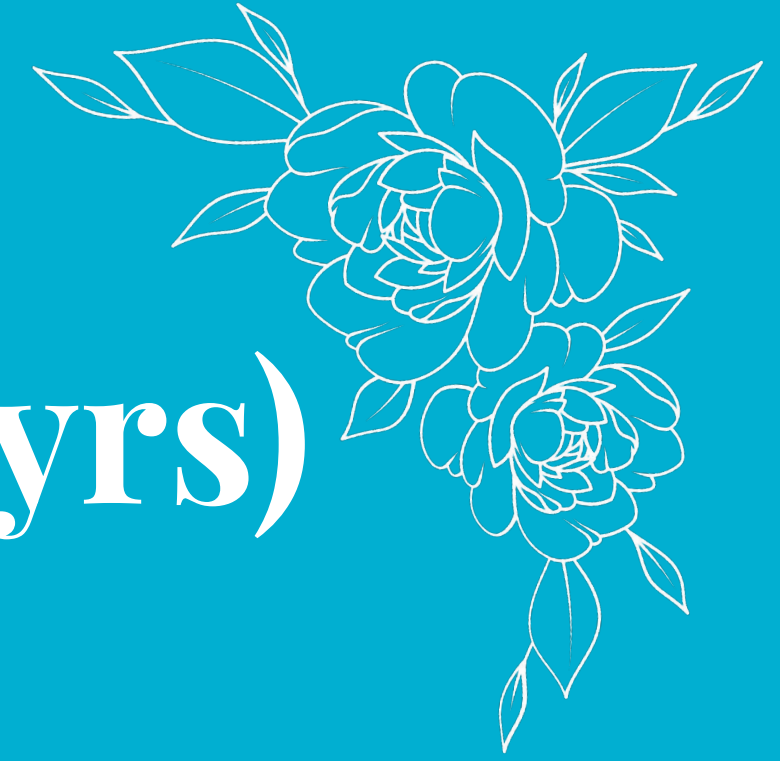
- Limited concept of death
- No understanding of permanence
- They do sense, changes in routines, emotions, environment and absorb the emotions around them

- Behavioural Signs

- Changes in sleep, appetite
- Irritability, clinginess, crying, fussy, signs of distress
- Withdrawn, less interactive



Understanding Grief in Infants/ Toddlers (0-2 yrs)



- Supportive Strategies

- Consistency in care, caregivers and environments
- Stick to a familiar routine
- Provide reassurance
- Use transitional objects (e.g. favourite blanket)
- Use soothing techniques (rocking, holding, gentle touch, soothing voice)
- Respond to distress promptly, provide a calm and nurturing environment



Understanding Grief in Preschoolers (3-5 yrs)



Understanding of Death

- Limited understanding of death
- Concrete thinking (sleep, pass away)
- Death is reversible, temporary
- Magical thinking



Behavioural Signs

- Regressive behaviours (thumb sucking, bedwetting)
- Increased fear of being separated from caregiver
- Sadness, withdrawn, anger, clingy, frustration
- Confusion (repeated questions)
- Nightmares, difficulty sleeping
- Stomach ache, headache
- Change in play (reflecting death)
- Physical symptoms

Understanding Grief in Preschoolers (3-5 yrs)



- **Supportive Strategies**
- Use simple language, answer questions honestly, and allow for play
- Use simple language, use clear terms
 - Died
 - Brain and body are no longer working
- Answer questions honestly
- Allow for play
- Draw or play out their feelings
- Provide comfort and stability
- Normalize emotions
- Try to keep to a regular schedule



Understanding Grief in School Age (6–9 yrs)



- Understanding of Death

- Understand death as permanent but
- May struggle with inevitability and universality
- Concrete and literal thinking (asking detailed questions about the death)
- Curiosity about death

Behavioural Signs

- Puddle jumping
- Fear, anger, guilt, blaming self, sadness, crying, withdrawn
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep issues
- Physical complaints
- Attention seeking
- Fear of abandonment



Understanding Grief in School Age (6–9 yrs)



Supportive Strategies

- Provide reassurance, comfort and emotional support
- Encourage open communication
- Offer opportunities to express feelings through art, writing or storytelling
- Maintain structure and consistency in routines
- Answer questions honestly
- Validate feelings
- Don't overload with information, give it in bite size pieces



Understanding Grief in Pre Teens (10 – 12 yrs)



- **Understanding of Death**

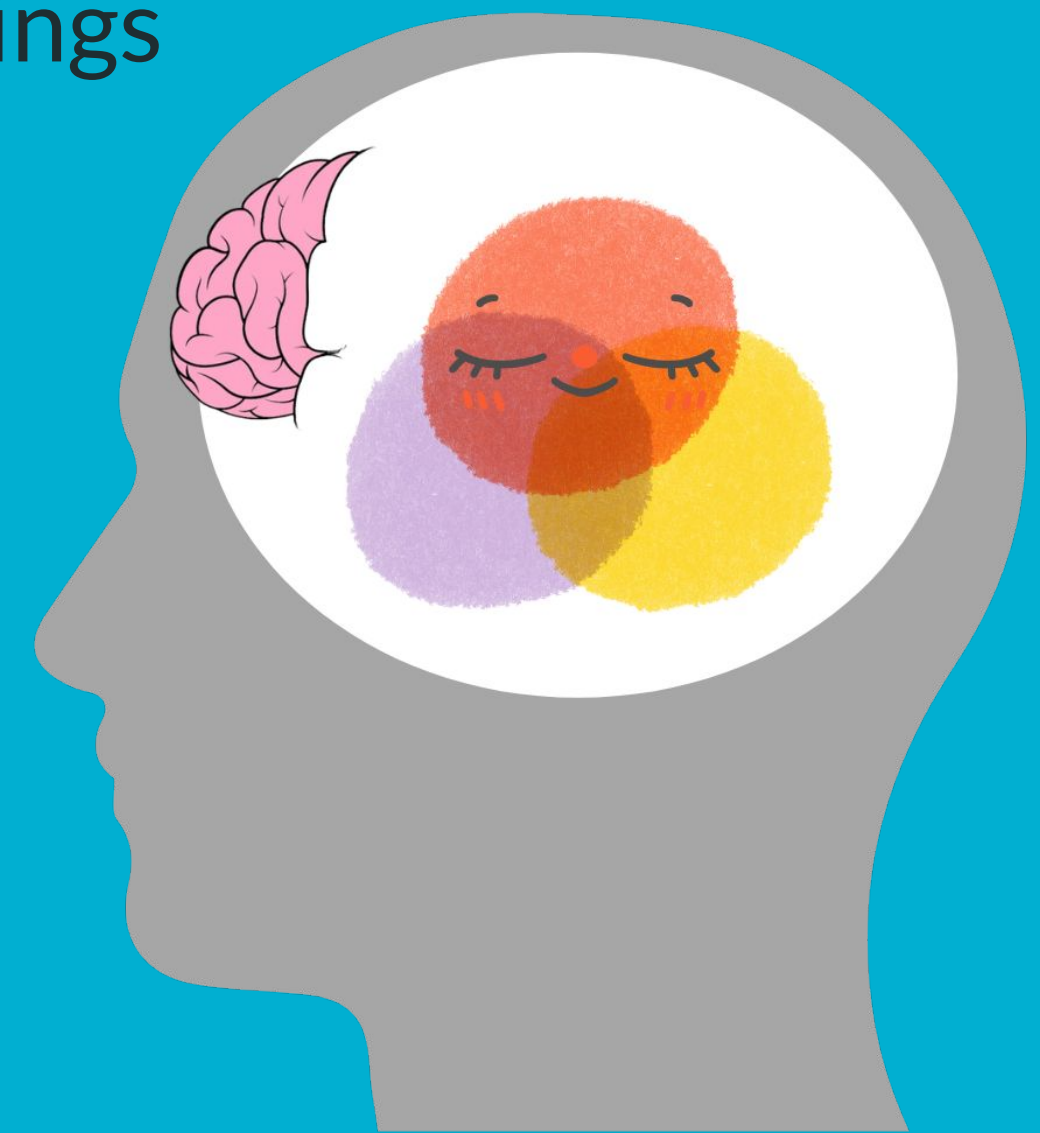
- Death as permanent and inevitable
- May not associate it with themselves (universality)

- **Behavioural Signs**

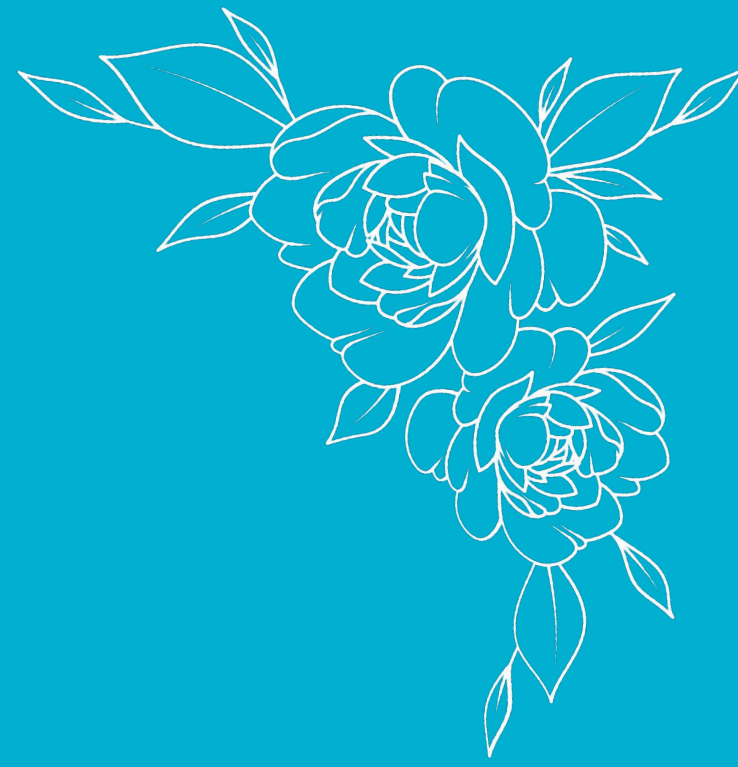
- Withdrawn, acting out, difficulty concentrating, reluctance to discuss feelings
- Heightened anxiety
- Sadness, anger, irritable
- Increased independence OR clingy
- Physical symptoms

- **Supportive Strategies**

- Encourage them to express feelings
- Provide structure and stability
- Monitor behavioural changes
- Provide ways to express grief and remember such as artwork, meaningful activities



Understanding Grief in Teens (13+ yrs)



- **Understanding of Death**

- Death is permanent and inevitable
- Associate it as universal
- May lead to more complex questions (existential questioning)

- **Behavioural Signs**

- Withdrawn, acting out, difficulty concentrating, reluctance to discuss feelings
- Intense emotional response
- Fear, anxiety, anger, rebellion, depression
- Risk-taking behaviour
- Difficulty concentrating

- **Supportive Strategies**

- Encourage them to talk when ready
- Provide structure and continuity
- Monitor behavioural changes
- Peer support



What kids might say

- Where did they go?
- Are they sleeping?
- Will I see them again?
- Why did they die?
- Will you die?
- Can I catch it?
- What happens to their body?
- Why do people cry?
- What if I don't feel sad?
- Can I still talk to them?



General Strategies

- Be curious – remember ALL behaviour has meaning
- Be honest
- LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN
- Don't use euphemisms
- Normalize and validate
- Model grief and coping skills
- Check in with them. "I'm curious"
- Try to keep to a regular schedule
- Encourage connection
- Share stories, talk about the person who has died
- Give them a choice whenever possible
- Talk with family or caregivers
- "I'm wondering" "I'm curious"



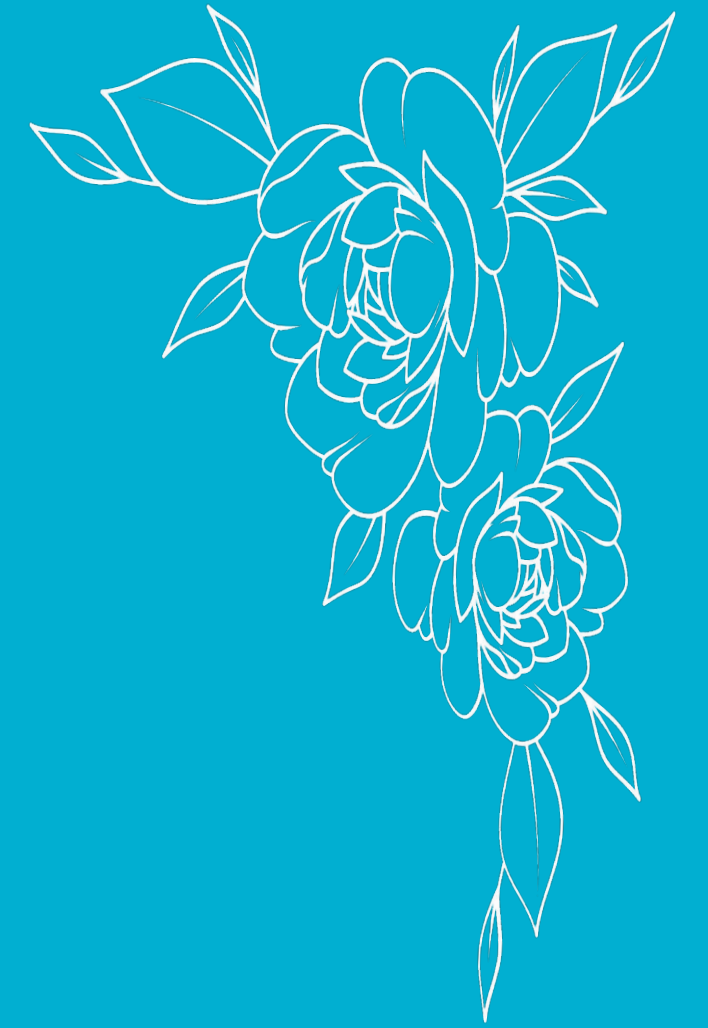
"What do you think?"

"Can you help me understand your question better?"

"You would like to know...?"

"That's an excellent question."

Building a Supportive Space



- Incorporate Death and Grief Literacy
- Encourage empathy and understanding
- Take trainings and educational opportunities
- Create a resource list
- Knowing when to reach out for help

Be the calm





Calm Place or Safe Space

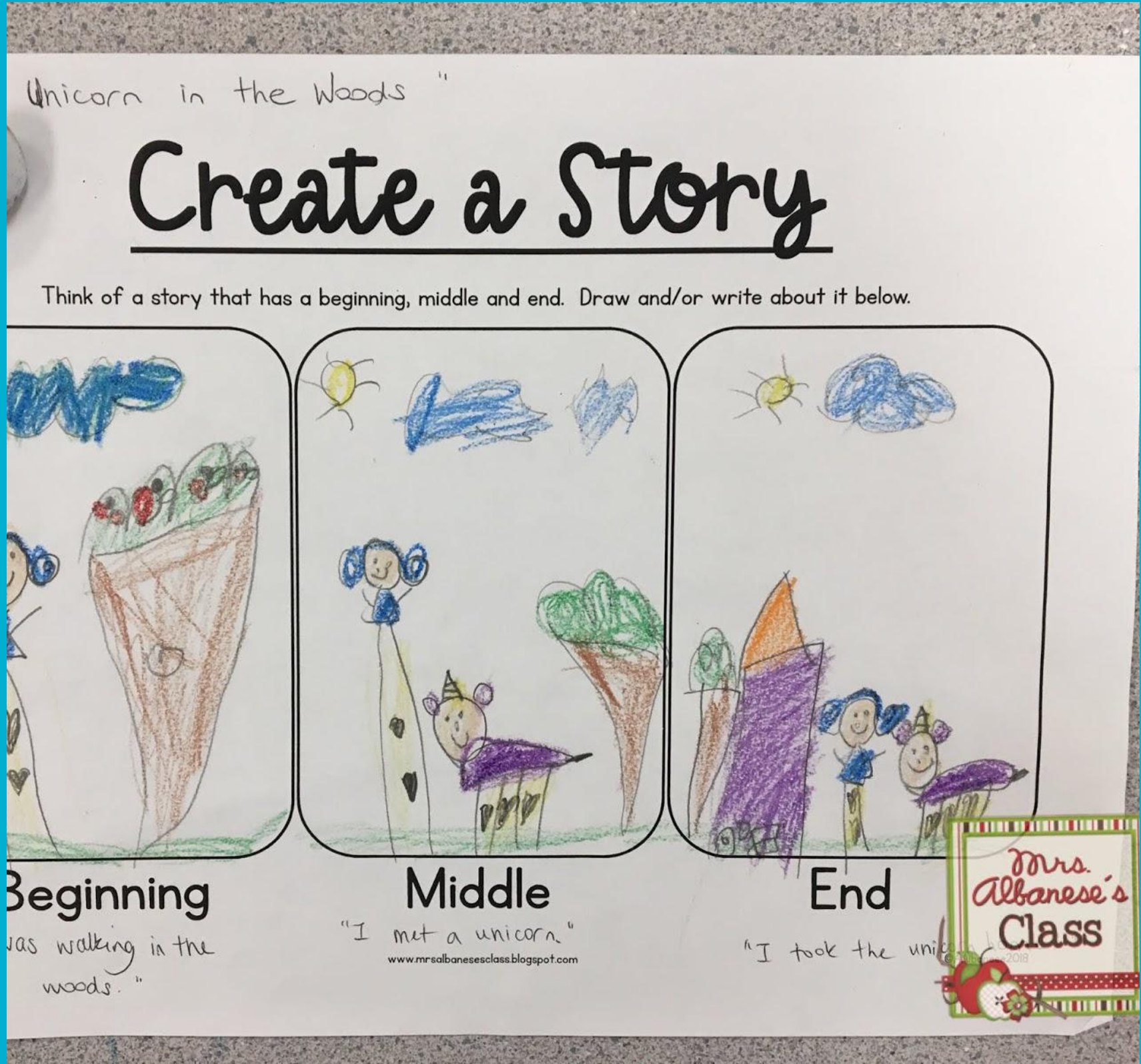
Where is this place?
What do you see, here taste, smell
What items would you like there
What is the lighting like?
Is it hot, warm, cold?
What objects would you like?
Would you like anyone there?
Secret passwords or passages? Magic portals?
What emotions or sensations you feel?



Be Right Back Jar



Developing their own story



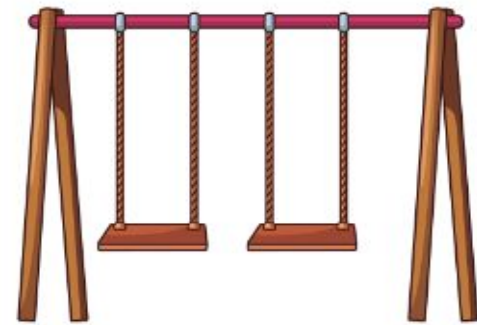
**SHAKE AND
SWIPE**



**TALK TO AN
ADULT**



SWING



WILD MONKEYS



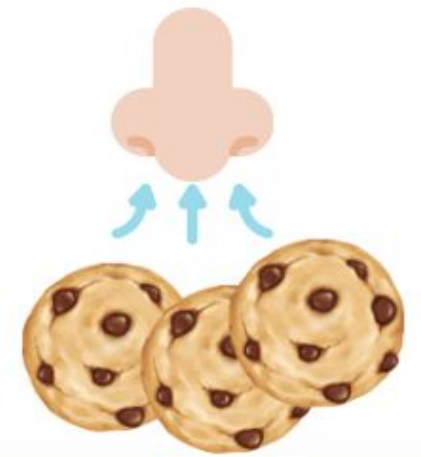
BUTTERFLY HUG



SPAGHETTI



**STOP, FREEZE
COOKIE
BREATHE**



5 4 3 2 1



SLIME



**BLOWING OUT
HAND CANDLES**



**HAND
BREATHING**



**HAND ON
HEART
BREATHE**



**CUDDLE A
PET**



RUN OR WALK



**PLAY WITH
FRIENDS**



COLD



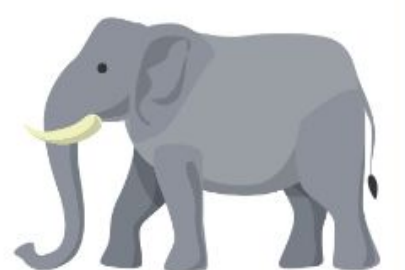
**CLAP, RUB
THROW**



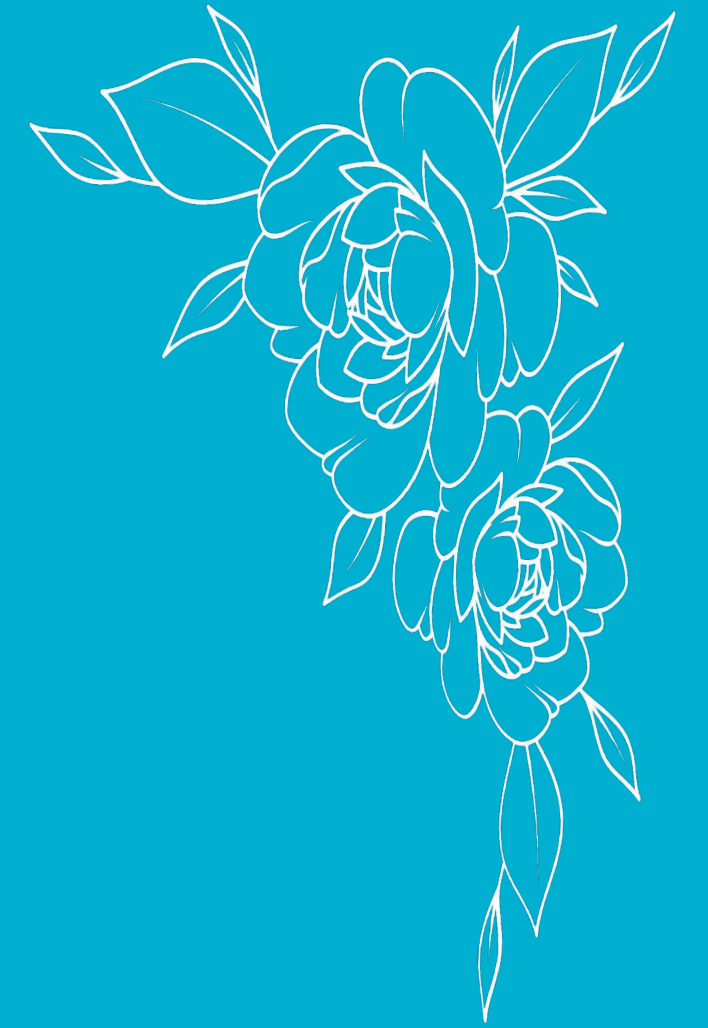
HUG, CUDDLE



**STOMP LIKE
AN ELEPHANT**



When to Seek Additional Help



- Prolonged changes in mood or behaviour
- Signs of depression or escalated mood swings
- Self-harm or expressions of hopelessness
- Difficulty functioning in daily life for an extended period
- Physical symptoms increase
- Gut or spidey sense

Remember The Family Grieves

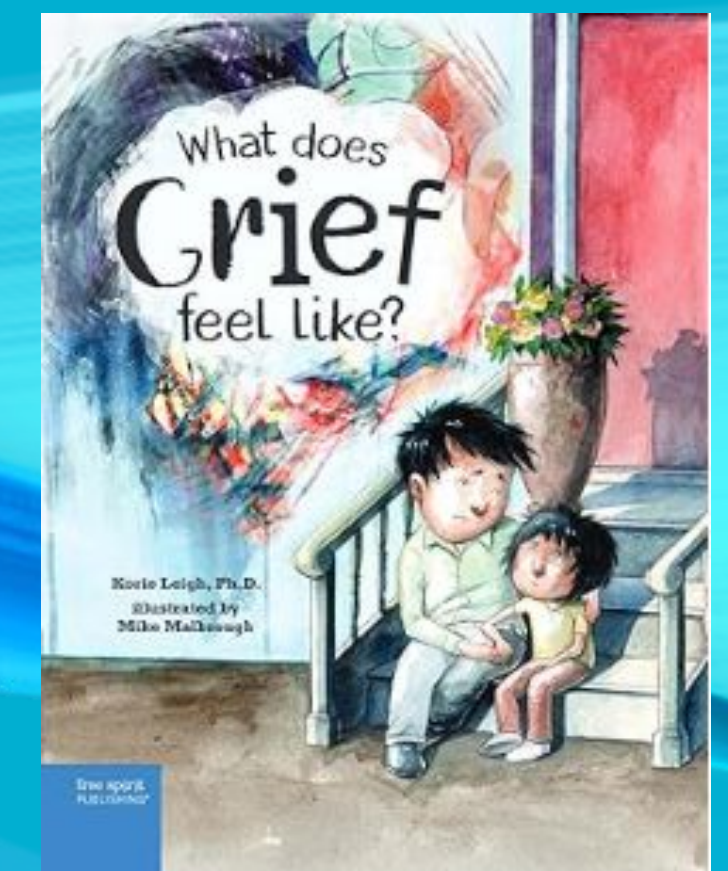
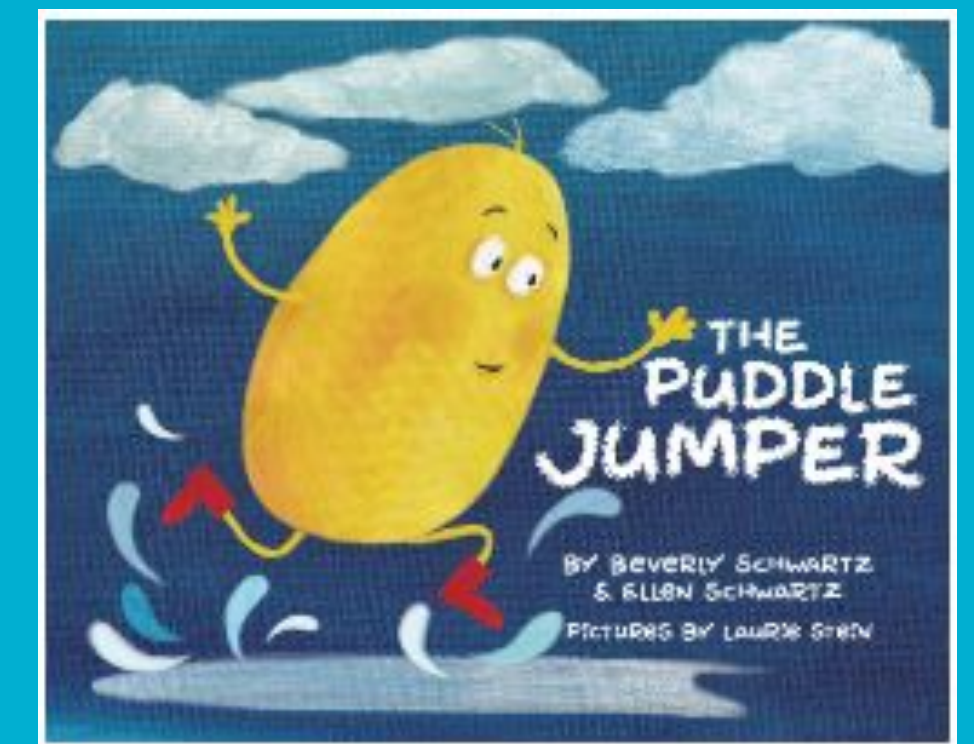
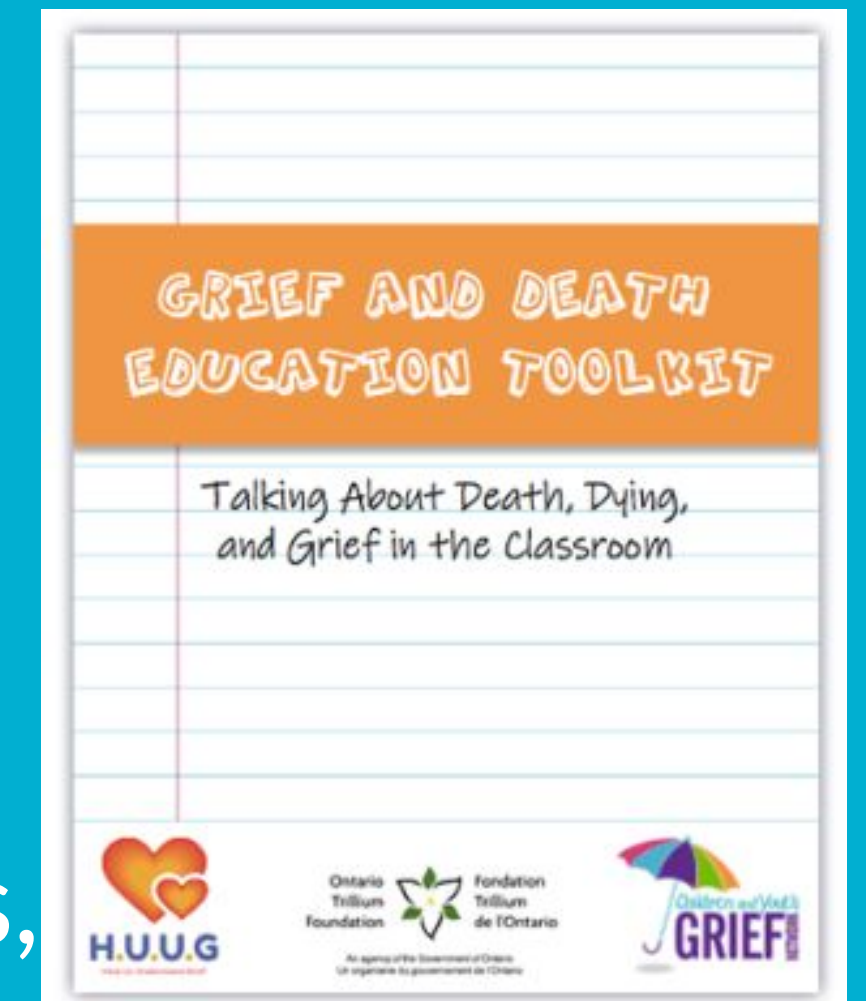


Remember YOU Grieve

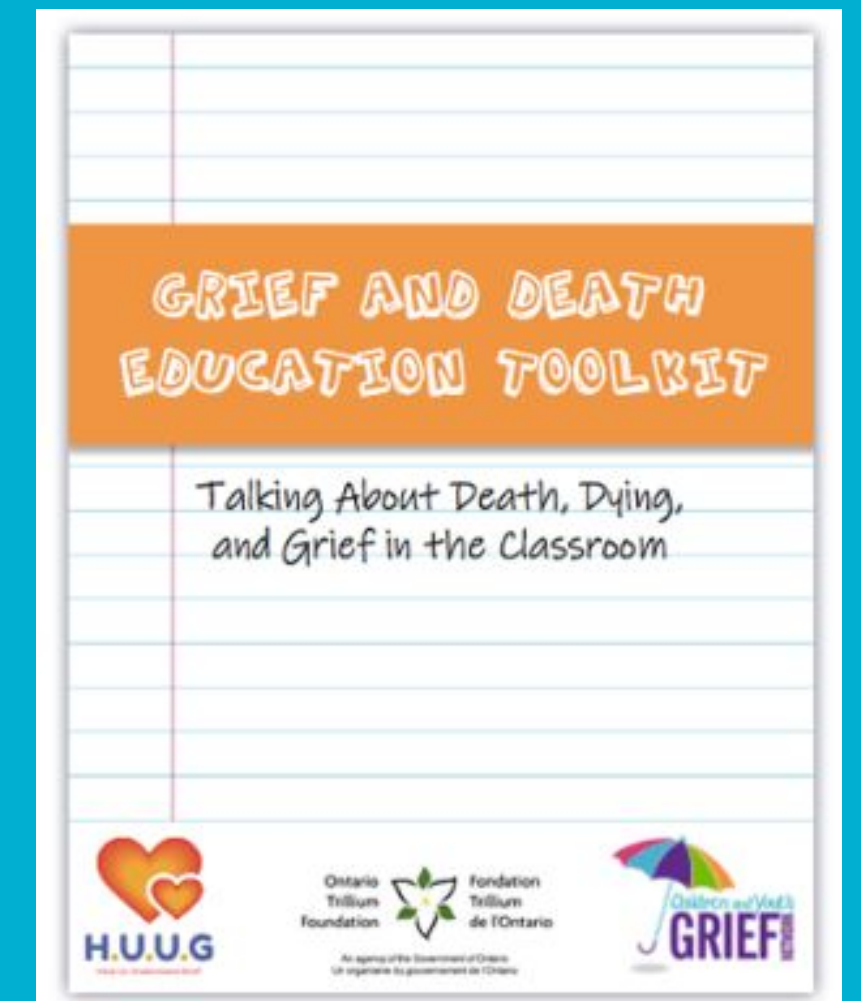


RESOURCES

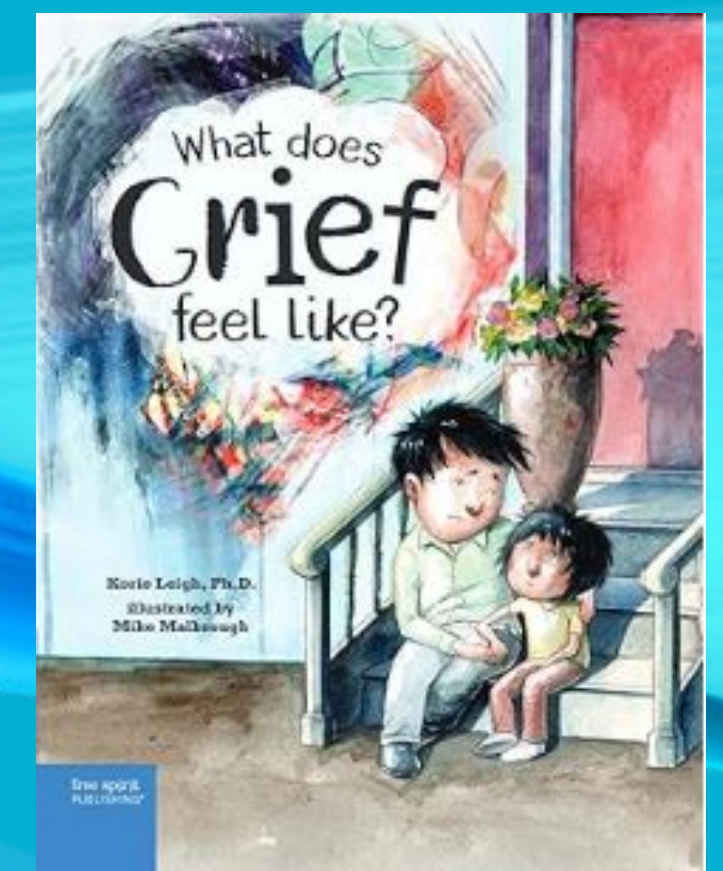
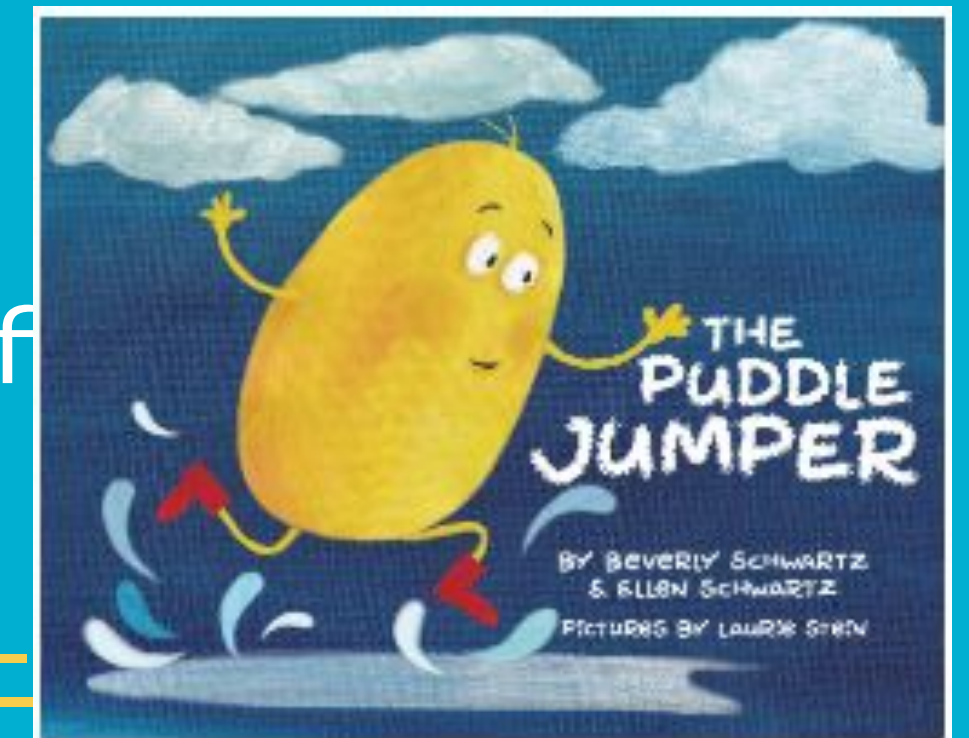
- Inner Sojourn – Children and Grief Resource Page (Organization links, book list, videos, downloadable pdfs and more)
 - <https://www.pattibroadfoot.ca/childrenandgrief>
- Dougy Centre (U.S. based)
 - <https://www.dougy.org/>
- Children and Youth Grief Network (& educators)
 - <https://www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com/>
- Bereaved Families of Ontario
 - <https://bereavedfamilies.net/>
- The Children's Grief Foundation of Canada
 - <https://childrensgrieffoundation.org/#top>
- Kids Grief.ca (Canadian Virtual Hospice) (& Educators)
 - <https://www.kidsgrief.ca/>



RESOURCES



- Sick Children's Hospital
 - <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/care-services/support-services/grief-bereavement-resources/>
- Sick Children's Hospital (Certificate Program)
 - Link is currently down (Oct 2024)
<https://sickkidscmh.ca/course/childrens-grief-and-bereavement-certificate-program-8/>
 - Their other webinars
<https://sickkidscmh.ca/course-category/working-with-children-youth-es/>
- Canadian Alliance For Children's Grief
 - <https://grievingchildrencanada.org/>
- Lighthouse For Grieving Children and Families
 - <https://lighthousegriefsupport.org/>
- Andrea Warnick
 - <https://andreawarnick.com/resources/>





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myculture.ca...



Distraction, Soothing or Strategy?



Distraction

- Talk with someone
 - Turn on TV
- Play on your phone
 - Go for a walk

Soothing

- Cup of tea
- Warm fuzzy blanket
- Cuddle and animal

Strategy

- Cold & Ice
- Breathing (double down, sigh)
 - Havening
- Opposite to emotion
- Punch or throw a pillow
 - 5,4,3,2,1
- Seek professional help