

# Coronavirus Bereavement: A Grief Like No Other

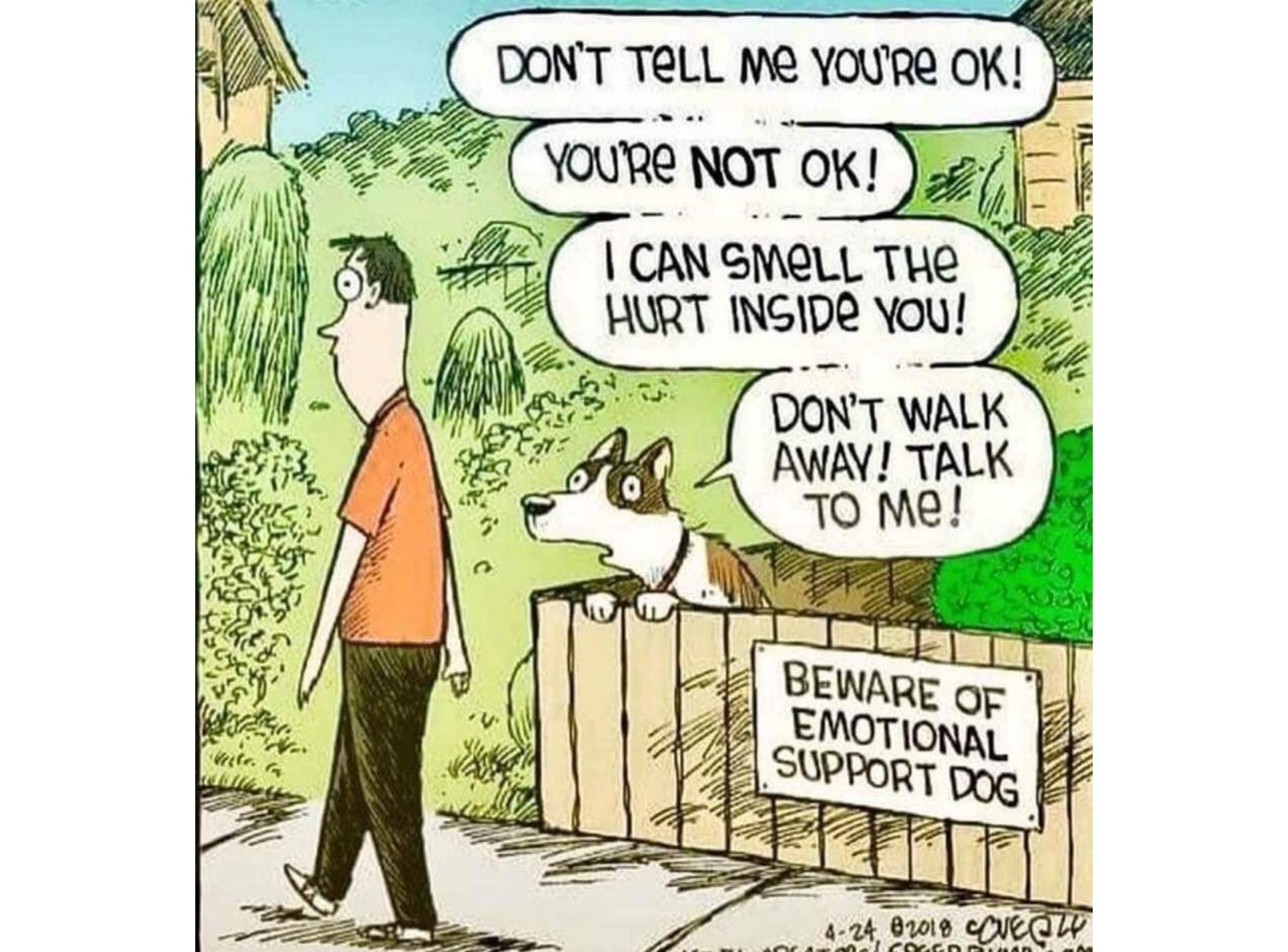
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California Association of Marriage & Family  
Therapists- August 13, 2021

# C.S. Lewis: 'A Grief Observed'

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No one ever told me that grief felt  
so much like fear.



DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE OK!

YOU'RE NOT OK!

I CAN SMELL THE  
HURT INSIDE YOU!

DON'T WALK  
AWAY! TALK  
TO ME!

BEWARE OF  
EMOTIONAL  
SUPPORT DOG

# Sobering Realities of Covid Deaths

- **The Bereavement Multiplier:** For every person who dies, **9** people are left behind to grieve: **4 million** worldwide deaths=**36 million** persons in the grieving as a result of covid deaths(Pinsker, 2021).
- **Death Rituals:** Inability to hold a service; no hospital visits; no viewing of body; no hugs; last rights; limited capacity
- **Politicized, publicized and debated pandemic**



# Group Question

# Grief and the Whole Person

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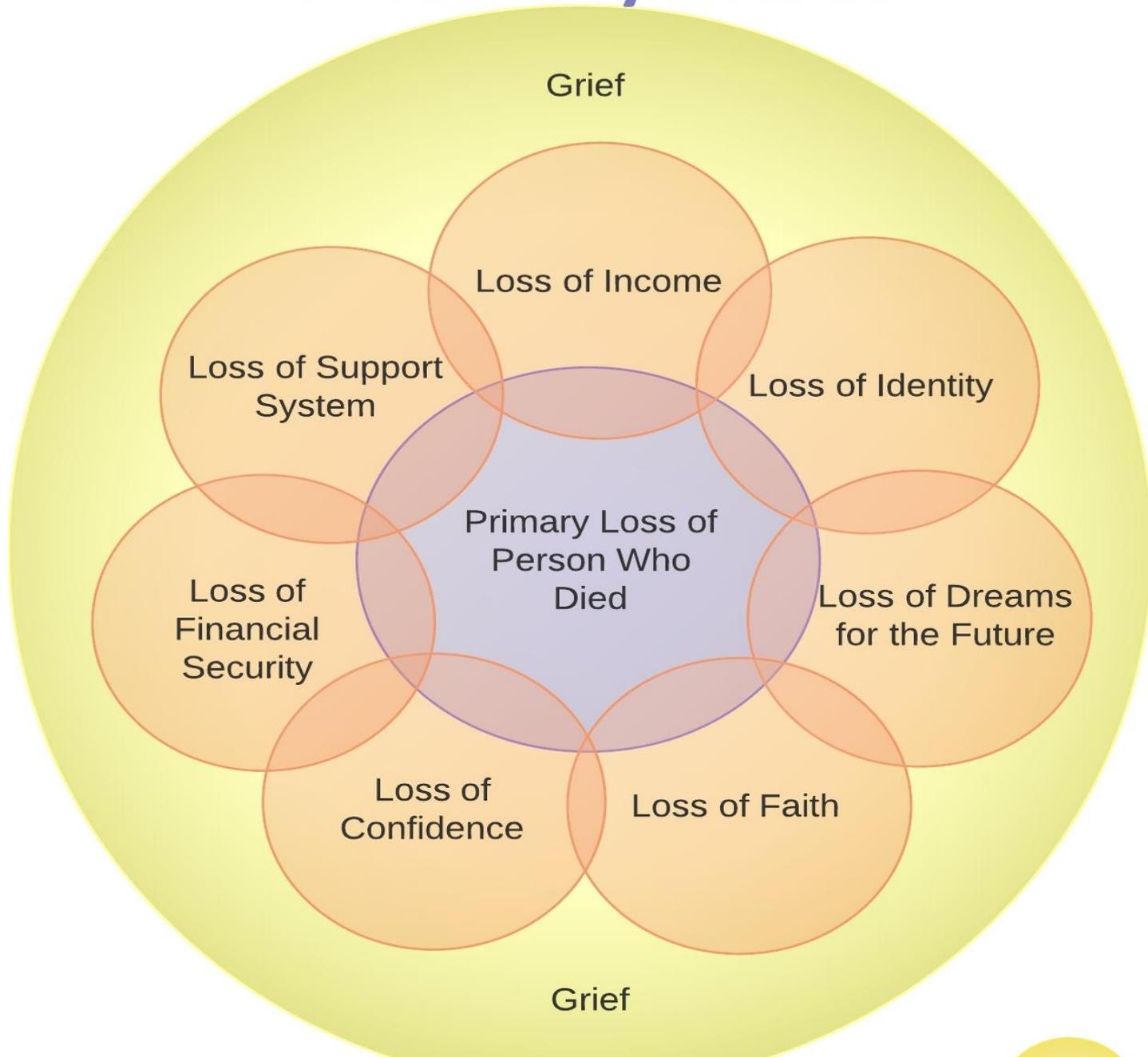
- ❑ **Physical** – sleep, eating, illness, aches & pains, low-energy, psycho-somatic
- ❑ **Mental** – rumination, forgetfulness, confusion, lack of focus, feel “crazy”
- ❑ **Emotional** – anxious, insecure, sad, labile, overwhelmed, angry, guilty, resentful, hopeless, relief, etc

# Grief and the Whole Person

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- ❑ **Spiritual** – angry with God, betrayed, questioning faith, search for meaning, closer to God, priorities shift
- ❑ **Social** – Identity loss, friends change, interest wanes, newly bereaved treated differently, resources may shift

# Secondary Losses



“For many, grief in contemporary society has been medicalized and perceived as if it were an illness that with proper assessment, diagnosis and treatment can be cured.”

“Companioning vs. Treating: Beyond The Medical Model of Bereavement Caregiving”  
by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

# Beyond Kubler Ross

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- ❑ Worden's Tasks of Grief
- ❑ Dual Process Model
- ❑ Meaning Centered

# Worden's Tasks of Grief

- ❑ To accept the reality of the loss:
  - Move away from disbelief
  - Use language such as “When your love died” not “passed on”
- ❑ To process the pain of grief
  - Process is the key word
  - Allow the narrative to emerge: story telling
- ❑ To adjust to a world without the deceased
  - Encourage minor changes, doing new things, taking on a role of deceased
  - Allow fun and play
- ❑ To find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life
  - Incorporate ritual on important dates

# Dual Process Model



# Meaning Centered

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1. Adjust to the uncertainty...
2. by integrating the loss...
3. through the retelling of stories...
4. in order to connect with your loved one...
5. to find meaning in the loss

# Meaning Centered, cont'd

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- ❑ Who am I now?
- ❑ Am I contributing?
- ❑ What legacy am I creating?
- ❑ What do I want to do?
- ❑ What would my loved one want me to do?

# Grief vs. Depression

Columbia Center for Complicated Grief

	Grief	Depression
<b>Self regard:</b>	Self-esteem is preserved	Feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing
<b>Predominant Affect:</b>	Emptiness and loss	Persistent depressed mood; inability to anticipate happiness or pleasure
<b>Dysphoria:</b>	Decreases over days to weeks; occurs in waves	Persistent, not tied to thoughts of deceased
<b>Pervasiveness:</b>	More positive emotions and humor	More pervasive unhappiness and misery
<b>Thought content:</b>	Preoccupation with thoughts and memories of deceased	Self critical or pessimistic rumination

# Covid Grief Challenges

## □ Anticipatory Grief:

- the feeling we get about what the future holds when we're uncertain (Berinato, 2020)

## □ Disenfranchised Grief:

- highly publicized, politicized and debated disease; disregard for life during covid

## □ Prolonged Grief:

- delayed ritual, postmortem confusion, isolation, guilt, meaninglessness, lack of freedom

# Covid Grief Challenges

Boxall, 2020

- “I’m still here in a world that has stopped.”
- “Covid disrupted my life and created a time warp.”
- “He was my Scottie. I loved him. Not being able to be by his side-for me, it’s almost traumatizing; even after he passed, I wanted to go to the mortuary to see him, thinking that would be ok, and I couldn’t even do that.”

# Covid Grief Challenges

- “Everything just feels fake-like I’m in this big, clouded fog, and someone is telling me, “Your brother died.” It doesn’t feel real because everything has been so different.”
- “Forgiveness can’t be granted or sought. Years of estrangement can’t end with a deathbed vigil. We are left holding a bag of of a lot of unfinished business.” Robert Neimeyer, Portland Institute for Loss and Transition

# Resilience & Post Traumatic Growth

- Anything new with PTG?
  
- Avoid the 3 P's: Seligman
  - 1) Personalization
  - 2) Pervasiveness
  - 3) Permanence

# O.D.R.: A Pattern for Human Growth

Rohr, 2008

## □ Order:

- There is order and predictability in life.

## □ Disorder

- Suffering and pain disrupt our ordinary lives.

## □ Reorder

- Seek deeper connection with our inner selves.

# Transitioning To In-Person Sessions

- You may be asking:
  - ▣ Do I feel safe to return to the office?
  - ▣ What if clients continue to prefer virtual appointments?
  - ▣ Are in-person sessions more efficacious than virtual?

# Challenges to Telehealth

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- Privacy
- Forming an alliance, especially with new clients
- Distractions
- Fatigue
- Distance and detachment
- Getting the full picture

# Benefits of Telehealth

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- Client's feel comfortable in their own environment
- Client's sense of safety; client's go deeper; less worry about therapist reaction
- Logistical benefits: commuting & parking out of equations
- Less cancellations

# Practical Strategies

Reidbord, 2021

- Develop guidelines with clients: stay home if sick
- Create a safe environment: exhaust fans, open windows, distance
- New clients in office
- Consistency with **either** telehealth or in-person therapy-creates structure
- Colleague Consultations

# Let's remember our calling!!!

Larson, 2021

- ❑ **Compass** that can guide *Passion*=Compassion
- ❑ What brought you into the therapy profession?
- ❑ What keeps you in the profession?
- ❑ We will get through this!

“None of us are getting out of here alive, so please stop treating yourself like an after thought. Eat the delicious food. Walk in the sunshine. Jump in the ocean. Say the truth that you are carrying in your heart like a hidden treasure. Be silly. Be kind. Be weird. There’s no time for anything else.”

~Anthony Hopkins

# Resources

- ❑ Spouse/Partner Loss: [soaringspirits.org](http://soaringspirits.org) & [campwidow.org](http://campwidow.org)
- ❑ Parent Loss: Motherless Daughters Facebook Group
- ❑ Young Adult Grief: [thedinnerparty.org](http://thedinnerparty.org) (20's-30's) & [covidgriefnetwork.org](http://covidgriefnetwork.org)
- ❑ Books
  - ❑ Healing After Loss-Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by Martha Whitmore Hickman (all losses)
  - ❑ Bearing the Unbearable-Love, Loss and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief by Joanne Cacciatore (all losses)
  - ❑ It's Ok That You're Not Ok by Megan Devine (all losses)
  - ❑ The Empty Room-Understanding Sibling Loss by Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn
  - ❑ The Worst Loss-How Families Heal From the Death of a Child by Barbara Rosof
  - ❑ Dying to be Free- A Healing Guide for Families After Suicide by Beverly Cobain
  - ❑ When Dinosaurs Die- A Guide to Understanding Death by Brown (children)

# DO THIS NOT THAT

## HOW TO HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND

While there is no one perfect way to respond or to support someone you care about, here are some good ground rules.

### DON'T

### DO

INSTEAD  
TRY

#### DON'T COMPARE GRIEFS

No one else has experienced their grief.

#### ASK QUESTIONS

You can connect by showing curiosity about their experience.

#### DON'T FACT CHECK OR CORRECT

Especially in early grief, facts and timelines can be confused.

#### RESPECT THEIR EXPERIENCE

It's not important who's "more" correct.

#### DON'T MINIMIZE

Even if you might think their grief is out of proportion to the situation.

#### REMEMBER THIS GRIEF IS THEIRS

Grief belongs to the griever. Your opinions are irrelevant.

#### DON'T GIVE COMPLIMENTS

When someone is in pain, they don't need to be reminded how wonderful they are.

#### TRUST YOUR FRIEND

All the things you love about the person will help them through this experience.

#### DON'T BE A CHEERLEADER.

When things are dark, it's OK to be dark.

#### MIRROR THEIR REALITY

When they say, "This sucks," say, "Yes, it does."

#### DON'T TALK ABOUT "LATER"

Right now, in this present moment, that future is irrelevant.

#### STAY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Or if the person is talking about the past, join them there.

#### DON'T EVANGELIZE

When something has worked for you, it's tempting to prescribe it for others.

#### TRUST THEIR SELF-CARE

They know themselves best. What works for you may not be for them.

#### DON'T START WITH SOLUTIONS

In most cases, people need to feel heard, not be "fixed."

#### GET CONSENT

Before you offer advice or strategies.

## SHOW UP. LISTEN. DON'T FIX.

### ABOVE ALL, SHOW YOUR LOVE.

Be willing to stand beside the gaping hole that has opened in your friend's life, without flinching or turning away. Your steadiness of presence is the absolute best thing you can give.



**REFUGE IN GRIEF**

Emotionally Intelligent Grief Support  
[www.refugeingrief.com](http://www.refugeingrief.com)



Thank you!

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