

Coping with Bereavement

Practical Strategies to Empower and
Support You

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1. The Biopsychosocial Parts in Bereavement

Consider aspects of your overall functioning that feel relevant to how you are and will continue to experience your bereavement. Are there particular biological/medical, psychological/emotional or societal/environmental challenges or strengths that feel relevant to your journey? Are some of those challenges something you want to hone in on to help yourself (e.g., very limited sleep/ insomnia in terms of your biology being addressed by better sleep hygiene; social strength of having a trusting relationship with a religious leader being something you might want to draw more on right now).

In Figure 2.2 below you can pick two colours and mark the areas of challenge and areas of strength differently. Show your notes to someone you trust (personal relationship or maybe your GP) to think further about what might be helpful next.

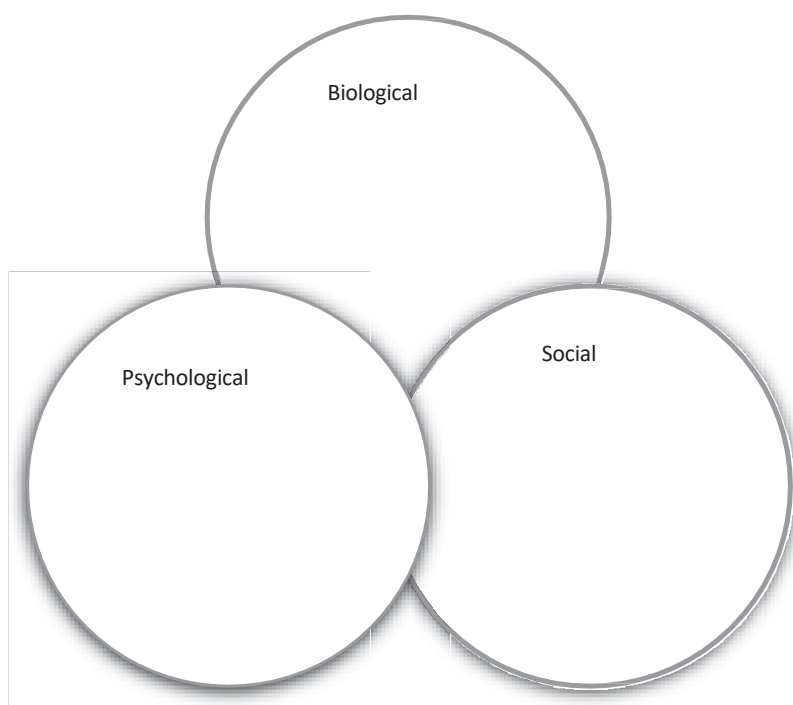


Figure 2.2 Blank biopsychosocial diagram

I have included my write up to get you started (challenges in **bold** and strengths in *italic*):

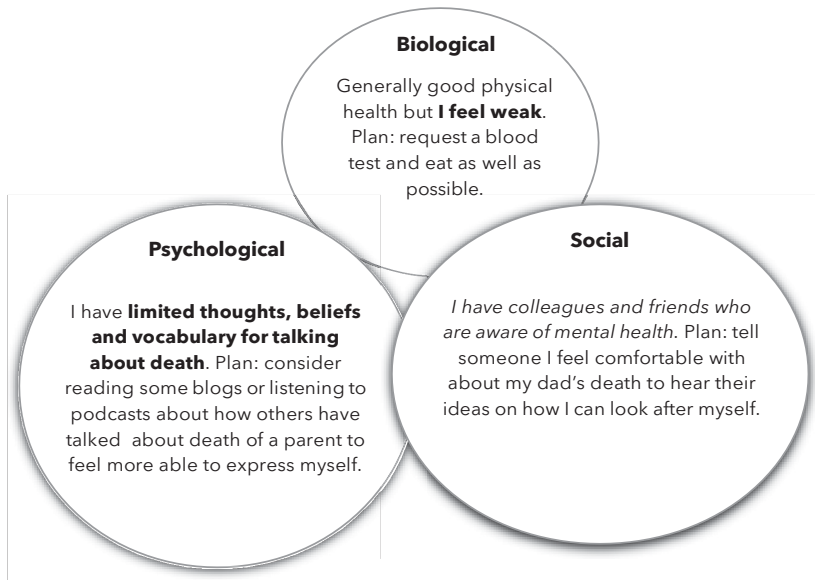


Figure 2.3 Author's own biopsychosocial diagram

2. Explore Your Relationship to the Idea of grief

Examine your stories about death and bereavement by answering some of the questions below. Leave space between them so that you can add, rewrite or cross off parts of what you might write. It is all about increased reflection, expanded thinking and making space for words about feelings. You can also ask those close to you the same questions to inform your own way of relating to bereavement by their perspectives, if helpful/meaningful. Gaining more clarity about how you made sense of death and bereavement growing up will go a long way in helping you understand your responses now.

My relationship to bereavement:

- What is my earliest memory of learning about someone's death? How did the adults seem to feel/behave at the time?
- What was the story about death that was shared with me growing up?
- What aspects of going through bereavement did I see my family engage with growing up? Which were they not able to engage with?
- What beliefs did the adults around me seem to hold about death and bereavement?

- What beliefs did the adults around me hold about emotions that might be felt when someone dies?
- What beliefs did the adults around me hold about showing emotions e.g., by crying, shaking, shouting, talking about needing or missing someone?
- Where is my relationship to mortality at now and where would I like it to be moving forward?

3. Considering the Relevant “Tasks” as part of Navigating Bereavement

Earlier in the chapter I introduced you to models of bereavement, including Worden’s ideas together with my own version for each of the “tasks”. Here I would like to encourage you to write in either what has already happened/you achieved, or what you would like to see in yourself and/or would like to happen moving forward, as a sign of being able to address that “task”/stage of your journey. Feel free to write “I don’t know” at first, and then return to it as you read on.

Table 2.2 Worden’s (2018) model of bereavement process

Task	My definition
Task 1: Acknowledge the reality of the loss.	
Task 2: Process the pain of grief.	
Task 3: Adjust to a world without the deceased.	
Task 4: Find a way to develop an enduring connection with the deceased even as you embark on a new life.	

4. Get to Know Your Rumination Patterns

This worksheet invites you to identify the type of rumination (out of the five types described) and prompts you to consider if the thought is helpful or unhelpful (I have said earlier that bereavement rumination is not helpful, yet I want you to have an opportunity to decide that for yourself). From there, if the thought feels unhelpful to you (is not serving you or helping to cope), the worksheet invites you to rewrite it so that it does feel helpful.

The rewriting part can be hard to come up with, especially if you are having the ruminative thought right now. You can walk away from the worksheet, and come back to it a little later. You can also ask someone you are comfortable with, to help you write a more helpful version of the thought.

Another useful way of doing this is to imagine that it is someone you care about that is having that thought in the context of their bereavement - write how you would respond to their ruminative thought (when we feel emotionally affected by something, it is often more possible to think clearly if we place someone else in our scenario giving us our usual perspective and ability to consider the bigger picture much more).

Ruminative thoughts

<i>Ruminative thought</i>	<i>Type of thought (reaction, injustice, meaning, relationships, what if)</i>	<i>Helpful or unhelpful</i>	<i>More helpful thought</i>

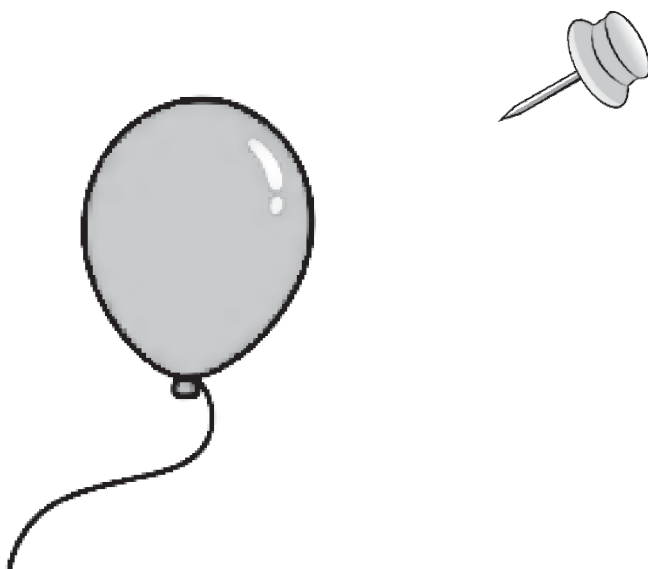
5. *Balloons in the Air - ACT-Informed Strategy*

Balloons in the Air is a strategy designed to help you loosen the grip on those thoughts and gradually allow them to move slightly further away from you. Imagine a collection of balloons. Choose a colour (maybe a colour that represents how heavy/difficult the thought has been for you, e.g. red or black for anger or sadness). Imagine inflating it with helium (so it floats), and with a black marker writing the rumination you have been feeling consumed by on the balloon.

Write the thought exactly how it has been coming up in your mind.

Once you have visualised the thought written on the inflated balloon, notice how tightly you are holding it. Gradually release the grip; don't forget to breathe. Gradually let go of the balloon altogether allowing it to float.

Visualise it floating higher and higher. Notice how your body is feeling as the distance between you and the thought widens. Watch the balloon reach the clouds, and eventually disappear into the cosmos. Remember to breathe. You have let go of what has not been serving you (what has not been helpful).



The Balloons in the Air strategy

If imagining the strategy feels tricky to stay with, use it in the literal sense. You can either inflate the balloons with helium, or simply with air and then pop them with a needle or a pin. Notice how your body feels once the balloon is let go of or popped. Notice any changes in muscle tension, how high you are holding your shoulders and how your breathing might have changed. You have let go of what has not been serving you (what has not been helpful). Repeat the strategy with the same thoughts as often as it feels necessary and helpful.

6. Safe Place

Below is my script to help you create your safe place. You can read it each time you want to take yourself there. Alternatively, you can find written scripts as well as videos of various versions of this strategy on the internet. It is a useful strategy for when emotions become too difficult to manage.

Sit comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed. You can use earplugs or headphones with pleasant music if you wish. I want you to allow your imagination to come up with a vision of a place that feels safe and relaxing to you. It could be a beach, a forest, the top of a mountain, a temple, a desert, anywhere that feels right to you. Ensure it is a place you haven't actually been to, so that your imagination does not get stuck in the real practicalities of how to get there or negative memories from that place. Focus on what you can see in your safe place. Take your time to really look around. Be curious and notice all the details. You can have whatever and whoever you would like in your safe place. Equally, it can be very bare with just grass or sand as far as you can see. It is completely your choice.

Now focus on what you can hear in your safe place. This might include your own breath, sounds of nature, music, laughter, traffic, whatever you wish. Notice it. Now focus on what you can smell in your safe place. Be curious and pay attention. Is it the sea, the trees, your deodorant/someone else's, the rain? Notice it.

Now go to your sense of touch. What textures, temperatures, shapes and consistencies can you touch? Is it water, moss on the ground, cold rocks, your favourite blanket, your dog? Notice it.

And finally, notice what you can taste. Your favourite drink, your dry or moist mouth, your chosen meal, the salt from the sea, the berry you have just picked? Notice it.

Take it all in. The sights, sounds, smells, touch, taste. Take a few breaths at a pace and depth that feels good to you and notice.

Enjoy being in this place. After a few breaths and moments of being there, allow your imagination to suggest a name for your safe place. It could just be "my safe place", or it could have a name only you know or understand. It can be absolutely anything; this is your place.

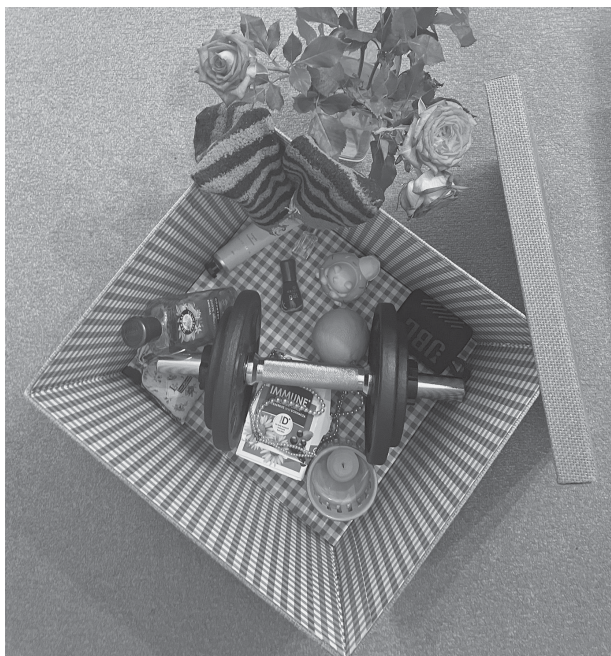
If you wish, you can also incorporate how you get into your safe place. Is there a path, stairs, a ladder, a rope, a gate only you have a key to or know about? Make it your own. Only you can access your safe place. Each time you do, you can also redesign it in whichever way you wish. Remember, nobody else knows or accesses it unless that is what you decide to have there with you. After a few more breaths, when ready, slowly guide yourself out of your safe place and back to where you are currently sat down. Take your time. Ensure that you close the entry and/or make it secure so you can return whenever you wish to.

Once out of your image, notice what impact going to your safe place has had on any upset or emotional distress you might have felt before taking yourself there. If there is any improvement, however small, I say it is worth practising! If there is none, you might want to change your safe place (in case it is reminding you of something difficult) or practice a few more times. Alternatively of course, try a different coping idea as you won't resonate with all of them.

7. Soothing/Treasure Box

The idea is to create a box, drawer, or bag that is solely there to soothe your senses. You might need to trial a few ideas to know what helps your senses to feel soothed. You might also want to think practically about which items can be portable/easy to pick up on the go, and where will be best to keep your box.

I do call it my Treasure Box, because it also brings the element of playfulness, and playfulness is a natural cue of safety and soothing for our minds and bodies. Below is a photo of my Treasure Box, and underneath it, an itemised list of what I have in it and why.



Touch

- (1) a dumbbell - touching and feeling the weight as I exercise helps me to feel present and physically able
- (2) a yellow squishy item - he has been through lots of squeezing, bless him; squeezing him in my hand helps to release anger and anxiety that my hand muscles tend to hold
- (3) soft, comfy socks - in the winter these are such a source of comfort. I feel the warmth and the texture of them, I also see the smiley foxes on the socks which brings lightness to how I feel

Smell

- (4) herbal essences shampoo - using and smelling it helps me to feel that I am able to look after myself (the nail varnish is in there for the same reason)
- (5) flowers and a small bottle of perfume - those lovely smells help to take away the heaviness bereavement can bring up. For me, flowers really help to offset the challenges of the winter months (my dad died in winter), as they are a reminder of nature and beauty, and that seasons and moments of struggle do pass

Taste

- (6) detox tea - the taste and idea behind it also helps to remember there are things I can do to take care of myself
- (7) an orange - food in general - is a natural form of soothing. Comfort eating is very natural and can be helpful so long it is not the main go to and is balanced with movement and done with awareness of what is nutritious for our bodies

Sight

- (8) a candle - smelling it and watching the flame helps me to slow down and breathe a little deeper
- (9) a pearl necklace I bought in a charity shop - I enjoy looking at it and playing with it while wearing it; I find it calming and

another reminder of ways in which I can take care of myself including wearing things I like. In addition, the pearls carry with them a history which I am continuing by wearing them. This reminds me that the past can be held in the present, including the bond we had built with the person who died.

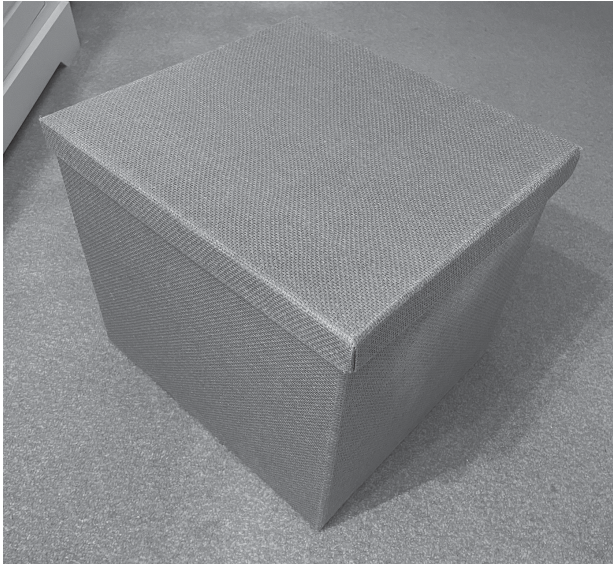
Hearing

(10) a speaker – what I hear really influences my thoughts and emotions. I have various playlists for different activities and challenges. One of them is a playlist of my dad's favourite songs. Another of my playlists is high in energy and nothing like what my dad would listen to; I like it, however, and it helps me to move more and burn off some of the emotional charge that way (headphones tend to be used if I need the music to be loud!)

I described each item in my Treasure Box to really show you that your box needs to be personal to you, it needs to make sense to you. Most of my Treasure items are to do with touch but yours might rely more on a different sense. It is really good to have at least one thing for each of the five senses.

It really does not matter if others don't understand why you have chosen your particular items. If it soothes you, you need it in there. Of course, avoid anything that might cause you harm (I mean things like self-harm, alcohol, substances and so on; if you do struggle with using those things as a way of coping, please look to Chapter 11 for how to access help, or contact your GP).

Below is a photo of an empty box. I would like you to jot down around it (or on a separate piece of paper if you are someone who does not write on books) the items that come to mind when you think about soothing your senses. And like anything, the more you practise helping your mind to consider the Treasure Box as something that might help in the moment of anger, sadness, fear, guilt, yearning for the person who died, the more this strategy will become useful to you.



8. Exploring Your Relationship to Bereavement Further

Learning about my current bereavement:

Things that keep me most connected to the person who died ...

Things that keep me most distanced from them ...

Things that help me with everyday life right now ...

Things that get in the way of everyday life ...

...
Things I can still do (or want to resume doing) that we both enjoyed

Things I have to do differently/stop doing because I can't do them with
the person who died ...

Things they would want me to be guided by right now ...

Things I want to be guided by right now...

Things I want for myself moving forward through this journey ...

Things I want to do for others moving forward in relation to this
bereavement ...

Summary Reflection

What I have learnt about my experiences growing up and where I am at with my current bereavement journey is as follows:

9. Change Letter to the Person Who Died

Often, when thinking about death and bereavement, the notion of a goodbye and the end is talked about. Funerals are often referred to as “the final goodbye”. I propose reframing this as a change, albeit distressing and painful, within the relationship with the deceased. This expansion of the meaning of one’s death is more conducive to continuing the attachment established with the person who died. It can open up space for increasing connection and reducing distance between you and them, gradually of course. In my own experience, I have thought about my dad as someone I continue to have a relationship with. To illustrate this way of coping, I have written a Change Letter to my dad (below). My hope is, if this idea resonates with you, that my letter will give you courage and inspiration to write your own some time.

Your Change Letter:

Dear ...,

10. Acts or Rituals to Create Closeness

Below is a photo I took in December 2024, around the ninth anniversary of my dad's death. We loved nature; especially where water and trees were involved. Not to mention mushroom picking (there's a big foraging culture in Poland and most children are taught how to distinguish edible porcinis and boletes from any dangerous mushroom one might come across).

What is the point in me saying any of this? Growing up with nature as a daily background due to my dad's preference for the outdoors has presented me with a helpful way of feeling closer to him now that he is no longer alive.

On this particular Saturday in December, I decided to go somewhere I had not been to before (dad loved his road trip adventures!). I arrived, and did not feel like getting out of the car. I was already feeling low and lethargic that morning as I had a dream about my dad being in pain, the night before.

I leaned into my grief (practised what I preach, which varies in how hard it is to achieve depending on what is going on) by doing something my dad enjoyed. Going to his favourite camping site in the mountainous region of Poland called Bieszczady was, first, not feasible that morning as that involves a flight, and second, probably a bit too much for what I could tolerate that day given that I was feeling particularly sad and emotionally wobbly.

Once I got out of the car, I walked around the woods. Initially I felt a bit numb and resigned, but the wind, the cold air, children and dogs running around joyfully, as well as seeing fishermen having a good time (another thing dad enjoyed) helped me to feel more connected to the present moment.

After a while, I sat down on the pier you can see in the photo. I crossed my legs and did some deep breathing as well as meditation using the mantra "I am not the body, I am not even the mind" (well known mantra practised by many yogis). Meditation is NOT something my dad did; at least not formally. Nature was his meditation. And so, I incorporated something of me into something of him, meditation and breathing, into connecting with nature. And then, I had a good cry. It was helpful to release the built up sadness and missing him.

Whilst I repeated the mantra in my mind (there were people around and I felt self-conscious so I did it in my mind rather than aloud), I felt more connected to the trees, the earth, the air and the planet. And I chose to think about my dad and his body, as part of all of that. I know that thinking about the body being buried and what happens to it afterwards can be hard for many; it had been for me for the first few years. This time it was of comfort to know that he blended with what he loved so much – nature – and that in that moment I was connecting with him, through nature.

Afterwards I walked back to my car, feeling lighter, more present and ... happy.

Happy that I had that time with my dad by the pond, as you can see in the photograph below.

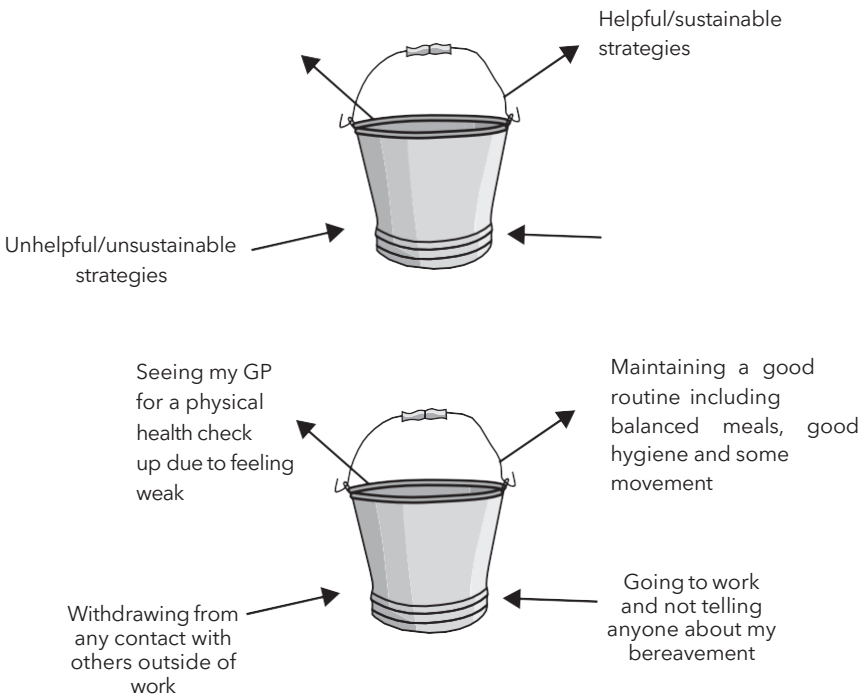
Now, none of the above might be your thing. You might hate winter and be afraid of water. That does not matter. What matters is that you begin to consider ways in which you can feel closer to the person you lost; what they stood for, what they were passionate about, what they liked.

I hope this strategy sparks your imagination, even if it is something you do not feel ready to do yet, but might be in the future.

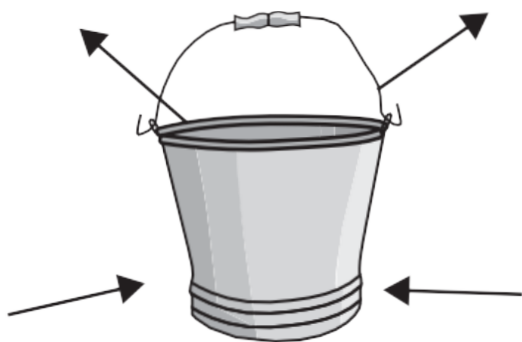


11. Stress Bucket

The Stress Bucket (Brabban & Turkington, 2002) is a frequently-used analogy to think about what can happen to our bodies, minds and environment depending on how much we are giving out and how much we are able to bring in in terms of care. Below, I have offered this analogy in ways focused specifically on the bereavement journey. The ideas include my own experiences. I want to invite you to draw out your own stress bucket.



Stress Bucket



12. Mario Analogy – Collecting Coins of Wellbeing

Sometimes, I hear from others that buckets and water coming in and going out can be anxiety-provoking. We all have our own triggers and preferences. With this in mind, I am offering you my own analogy I sometimes introduce clients to. It is informed by various therapy models as well as the Stress Bucket concept; it has a hint of playfulness too.

Whilst you might think that cartoons and animations are childish and have little to do with your struggles, I would like you to consider how memorable something like Mario might be on your journey. I would also like to let you know that playfulness and light-heartedness are cues of safety (Golding, 2017) for our minds, and so can increase your sense of calm and steadiness.

The idea is to consider all actions, places, items, people, that help you to collect as many coins as possible; with the coins representing small parts that contribute to your wellbeing/to your coping right now. You can do this in your mind, or physically. Each time something helpful happens, you can place a coin (a real one, one made of chocolate or another item like a pebble or shell) into a container. You can also take those items away from your container when something difficult happens on a particular day.

This is a visual and helpful way of monitoring your wellbeing as well as learning the things that make a difference to you, that are your Mario coins. I have given you some of my own examples below to get you started.



Collecting Coins

Coins out: I fell asleep with TV leading to poorer sleep and waking up because of louder scenes in the film that came on, with that in turn lowering my mood further the following day.

Coins in: The following day I tried to fall asleep to a specific programme with voices I find soothing. I found being in bed in silence intolerable. I got a bit more sleep this time and woke up less. This gave me energy to look at other coping strategies as well as offer emotional support to family members.

13. Light Stream Informed by EMDR Therapy

Many people, me included, find it helpful to have someone else talk them through something they need to visualise such as the Light Stream. Here is my written script you can read and practise if videos are not normally beneficial to you:

Sit comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed. Keep your eyes open or closed (whichever you prefer). With your imagination and attention, scan your body from the top of your head all the way to your feet and notice any discomfort or unwanted sensations (especially those that cannot be explained by chronic pain or physical injury). Once you have found them (they might be in your forehead, chest, hands, belly, feet or somewhere else), draw your attention to the sensation and be curious about it. Without thinking too hard, try to picture what shape, colour and size the sensation is. Try to match the emotion/s it might be indicative of (anger, anxiety, sadness, shame or something else). Notice if it feels hot or cold, light or heavy, spikey or smooth, still or in motion.

Now ask yourself what your mind and body needs to help this sensation along. Is it healing, calm, peace, warmth of a hug, compassion, patience? Notice what you need and, without thinking about it too hard, pick a colour that represents it. Now go back to the top of your head and visualise an unlimited light coming from above. The light is in the colour/s of the thing/s your mind and body currently need.

Allow the light to concentrate much more on the shape/sensation that is feeling difficult. Allow it to go around it, and through it. Breathe at a pace and depth comfortable and soothing for you and simply notice. Notice what impact the light gradually has on that sensation and part of your body.

Now allow the light to gradually and gently surround your body (and go through it if you need/want it to). Notice it going down your face, back of your head, down your neck, shoulders, upper back, lower back, arms, forearms, hands, your seat, thighs, knees, calves and your feet (with feet on the floor allowing the light to continue down through the floor into the Earth, with it being unlimited). Take a few breaths and notice what it is like to let this light in. Now allow the light to concentrate much more on the shape/ sensation that is feeling difficult. Allow it to go around it, and through it. Breathe at a pace and depth comfortable and soothing for you and simply notice. Notice what impact the light gradually has on that sensation and part of your body.

Bring as much of the light as you wish into that part of your body. Allow your mind and body to take what it needs. Remember to breathe.

14. Butterfly Hug Informed by EMDR Therapy

The Butterfly Hug is based on the EMDR principle of bilateral stimulation. It is called the Butterfly Hug as you place your hands crossed on your chest (forming what looks like a butterfly or a dove). You can also place your hands with each on the opposite arm if you prefer the Hug to be wider. Afterwards, follow these steps:

- (1) Sit comfortably somewhere you won't be disturbed. If you feel comfortable or prefer to, close your eyes. Notice what you are feeling (emotions and/or physical sensations in your body). You can give what you feel a number in terms of intensity (e.g. 6/10 sadness, where 10/10 is the most intense sadness you could possibly feel).
- (2) Place your hands as explained above. You can interlock your thumbs if you like.
- (3) Start tapping one hand at a time (you can think about it as the butterfly fluttering one wing at a time). Choose the speed that feels soothing to you. Tap one side at a time while you focus on the reassuring quality of your touch. Notice your breath and adjust the pace of how you are breathing in and out so that it feels soothing. If your mind goes elsewhere, gently bring it back to focusing on your tapping and your breath. You can say an affirmation in your mind or out loud, e.g. "This will pass" or "I can do this" or "I am strong".
- (4) Stop after each set of 8-10 taps and notice where the intensity of what you are feeling is now between 0-10. If it has reduced, even if just by a fraction, continue and pause every set to check in with yourself. If the intensity has increased or stayed the same, do a second set if you would like to. If after the second set you do not feel any relief, stop and consider trying one of the other strategies.

15. Dream Rescripting

The way in which I introduce the idea to my clients (and have tried the strategy myself) is to write two to three sentences on exactly how the nightmare starts (if it is a collection of nightmares choose the most recent one, the most distressing one, or describe the overall theme of the dreams). From there, we want to call on your imagination to increase the sense of safety, comfort and even laughter and pleasure. Here is an example of a bad dream/nightmare, and how it can be rewritten:

Original version:

It is the funeral and I am crying uncontrollably, almost struggling to breathe. I look at the coffin and can see that it is broken in one corner, and I can see (name of person who died)'s shoulder. Their burial continues even though I am trying to get the words out that something is wrong with the coffin, but the words don't come! I keep trying to make a sound but discover that I am unable to speak. I feel stuck and awfully upset. I then wake up crying uncontrollably.

You can imagine how the cycle of trying to make a sound and not being able to can continue and cause a lot of anxiety while dreaming and when awake again.

Re-written version:

It is the funeral and I am crying uncontrollably, almost struggling to breathe. I look at the coffin and can see that it is broken in one corner, and I can see (name of person who died)'s shoulder. I touch the coffin and discover that my touch heals the broken part. I can also see the colour blue gradually covering the coffin from where I am touching it, until it is all covered. The blue gives me a sense of care and lightness. The blue then also covers me and I can hear

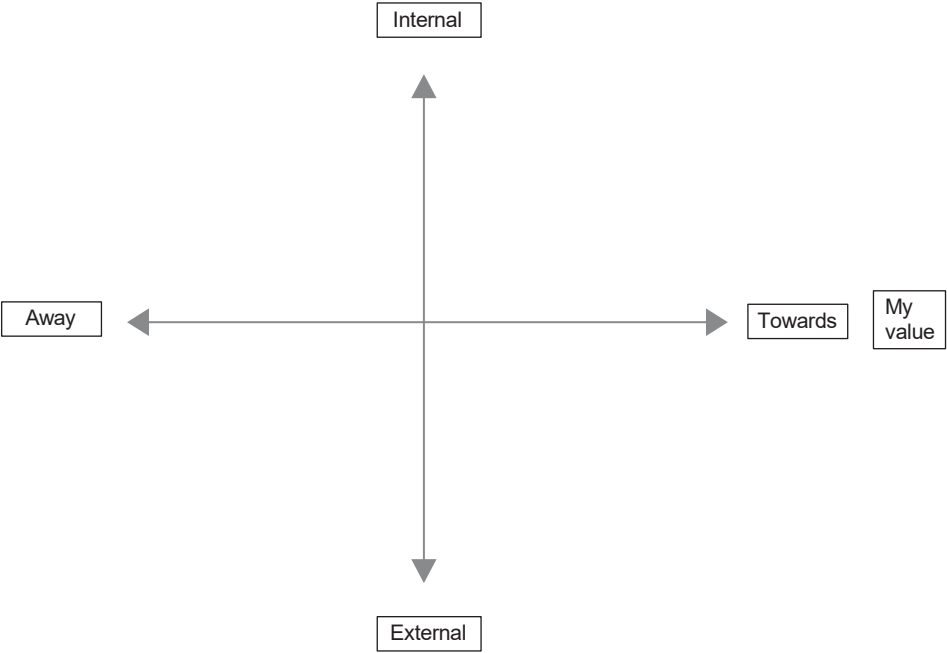
the voice of (person who died) saying "you don't need to worry about me".

You can bring metaphors, movie characters, special powers, religious ideas and anything else that has meaning for you into the re-written version of the dream. Once it is written down, the idea is to read it to yourself just before you start the process of falling asleep. Like with any of the strategies I am introducing you to in this book, practice and repetition makes perfect.

Original version:

Re-written version:

17. ACT Matrix



18. Maslow's list of needs

Maslow's category	My definition	Examples of how to meet my need
Physiological		
Safety		
Love and belonging		
Esteem		
Self-actualisation		

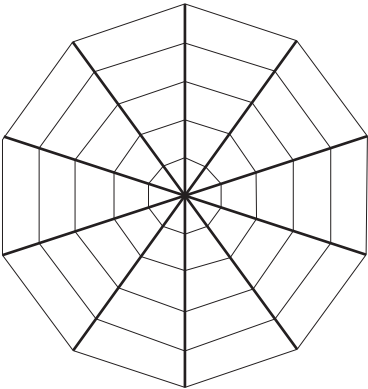
19. The Polyvagal Ladder

<i>Where on the Ladder are you?</i>	<i>What might you notice in yourself?</i>	<i>How can you regulate your nervous system?</i>
Safe, Social, Engaged		
Mobilised, Agitated, Frantic		
Numb, Collapsed, Shut, Down		

20. *Identifying intentional action and creating an action plan.*

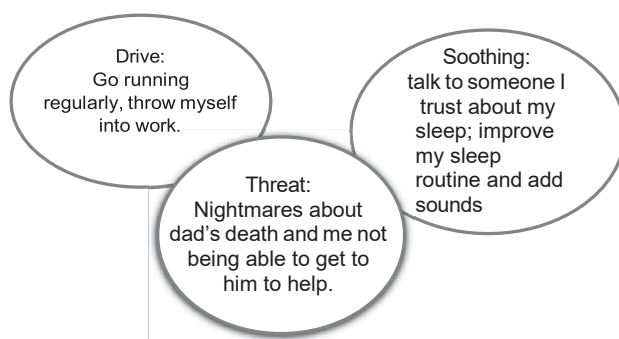
My Intentional Action:	
Pros	Cons
Taking the Action	
Not taking the Action	
Agreed Outcome:	
<i>Identified intentional Action:</i>	
<i>Action plan:</i>	
Step 1	
Step 2	
Step 3	

21. *Blank Spider Diagram*

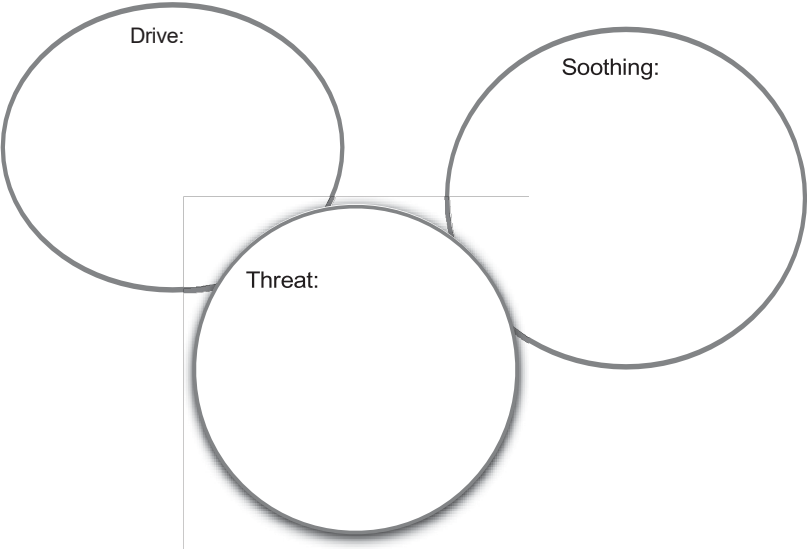


22. Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)-Informed Ways of Coping

Hopefully, if you have read the previous chapters, you will now be making some links between my recommendations there and the concept of the Soothing system and the importance of expanding it as much as possible. I have included a worksheet with the CFT Systems, which will allow you to write in your own specific observations and ideas. I am going to illustrate below my three systems in relation to my bereavement in the hope that it will clarify these ideas some more and get you started.



On the next page, there is also a description of each system to help you think about your own.



23. *Staying Connected to Your Parent Role*

Something that is specific to child loss is the idea of finding ways to stay connected to our role as parents. This can indeed replenish our Soothing system. Below is an incomplete list of things one can do to stay connected to one's role as a parent. I have started with some examples, but the list is unfinished to prompt you to come up with your own too if you can:

- Practise answering the question about how many children you have by including your child who died (if you struggle with this and would like to feel able to answer more fully).
- Collect items that remind you of your baby/child or ones you think he/she would have liked; you can have a special box for these and revisit when you feel able to or have those items out in the open perhaps being enjoyed by your other children or family members.
- Consider symbolic representations of your role as a parent, e.g. jewellery (some people choose to engrave a message, have baby's/child's ashes inside a pendant, or have a photo in a locket for example), tattoos (if this is something you are inclined to do) or planting a tree or another plant in memory of the child who died.
- Use creative arts (you don't have to be an artist!) to make a scrapbook about or for your baby who died; you can use this to talk about your baby with their siblings or other family members.
- Consider joining a relevant organisation to receive support and acknowledgement, as well as offer the same to parents in similar circumstances
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-
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24. Coping with Guilt and/or Shame about the Loss

What does compassion mean in practice? It means being focused on ways to reduce the pain one feels. There are three directions in which compassion can travel; from us to others, from others to us, and ... you got it ... from ourselves to ourselves. Yes, the last direction tends to be the hardest to achieve. This is partly why I tend to draw on compassion for others, to bring compassion to ourselves. Compassion is very different from shame in terms of how we talk to ourselves.

I would like you to take yourself back to the last time you were compassionate with someone. I want you to really take yourself back to that memory. Pay attention to:

- your tone of voice
- your posture / body language
- your facial expressions/how your face felt (frowning or soft)
- notice the words you were saying
- notice what you were feeling (warmth for the person, desperate want for them to see the bigger picture and move away from being unfair to themselves)
- what you did for them (offered a blanket, a hug, another time to check in and hear them out)

Now take yourself to how you believe they felt receiving this support from you. They might have dropped their shoulders in relief, they might have said that it was so helpful to feel understood and connected with, they might have smiled through the tears, they might have given you a hug or touched your shoulder appreciatively.

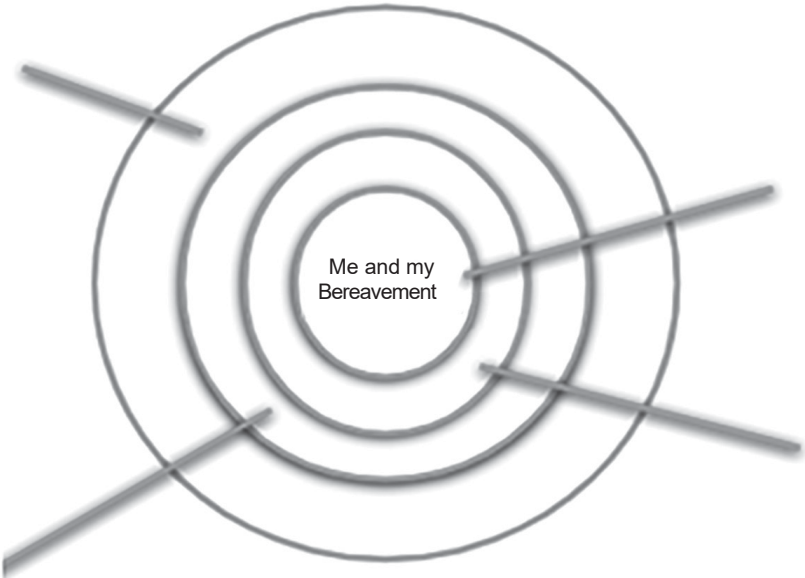
Notice how you feel whilst really going over that memory. Notice how your body feels physically, what emotions are coming up, what thoughts about yourself this brings.

Now, let's bring as much of that experience into your relationship with yourself; how you talk to yourself, which emotions you feel for yourself. If you can do it for others, there is potential to be that way with yourself, even if for a few moments. If one of the thoughts you are having is: "I caused my baby's death!", take what you have to give in terms of compassion for others to address that incredibly difficult thought.

What would you say to another parent with that thought? Yes! It comes quickly to us when it is someone else, right? Let's have you say it to yourself: "gosh, what an unfair thing to think of yourself!; I am so sorry you have been carrying this thought! I know you felt and continue to feel so much love for your baby! You are really suffering right now and deserve to feel supported in this tragic time; would you like a blanket and a hot water bottle to comfort you a little?"

Be careful not to minimise your experience (for example: "at least you have another child!") because it is unrealistic to expect that to take you away from the pain, and in fact shuts down your emotions instead of allowing them to be noticed and given the attention they deserve. Focus on saying to yourself the things you would say to someone close to you in the same situation.

25. *A Blank Ecomap of Sources of Support*



27. Sentences You Might Later Want to Use when Communicating with Those Around You While Navigating Bereavement after Suicide.

Talking about something that is already a societal taboo means that you will need to find suitable words/language to communicate in the way that feels okay to you. It will be helpful to make a list of words or phrases that you want to have in your toolbox whilst either telling others what happened to your loved one, or whilst being asked about it. Below are some ideas, with an opportunity for you to add your own:

- For now, all I am able to say is that they have died and we are currently planning the funeral.
- They were found by ... and we were told that they were unconscious when their heart stopped beating and did not feel much physical pain. I hope this brings you a little bit of relief as it does for me.
- They were struggling and so am I. I haven't got many answers, which I am trying to cope with. Questions currently feel difficult.
- The chaplain has offered to meet with anyone who feels affected. Would you like me to give you the contact details? I think that will be more helpful than talking with me about it just yet. I feel wobbly too.
- I would like to focus on the things we both know they would want us to be doing now, e.g., shall we make sure we have both showered and had something to eat this morning?
-
-
-

28. The Polyvagal Ladder when Navigating Bereavement after Suicide

Where on the Ladder am I?	What does that look like for me (what do others see me do)?
Safe, Social Engaged	
Mobilized Agitated Frantic	
Numb, Collapsed Shut Down	
What soothes my nervous system?	
What depletes my nervous system?	

29. Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)-informed ways of coping

One of the foundational concepts in DDP is PACE – an acronym for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy – a moral compass, which includes being guided by it in our relationship with ourselves. Let's look at each letter.

I will write out how I believe I try to talk to myself now about my grief. The context here is interacting with a close friend and her dad, being happy for my friend while their dad helps them with an issue in similar ways that dad, I imagine, would be supporting me if he was alive.

P: Thinking about having an imaginary chat with my dad about feeling jealous and frustrated, and him calling me by the term of endearment he always used to refer to me growing up.

A: Well, I feel angry. I also feel some jealousy here despite always wanting the best for my friend. It is fine. These are all human emotions I am allowed to have.

C: I feel hot in my chest. I wonder if this is frustration. Why frustration? Am I angry? Is this anger again about feeling robbed of my dad and his wisdom and support?

E: I have faced some really difficult life challenges after dad's death and really wanted his parental guidance. I have been through a lot. It is understandable I would feel a big bag of difficult emotions right now.

P:

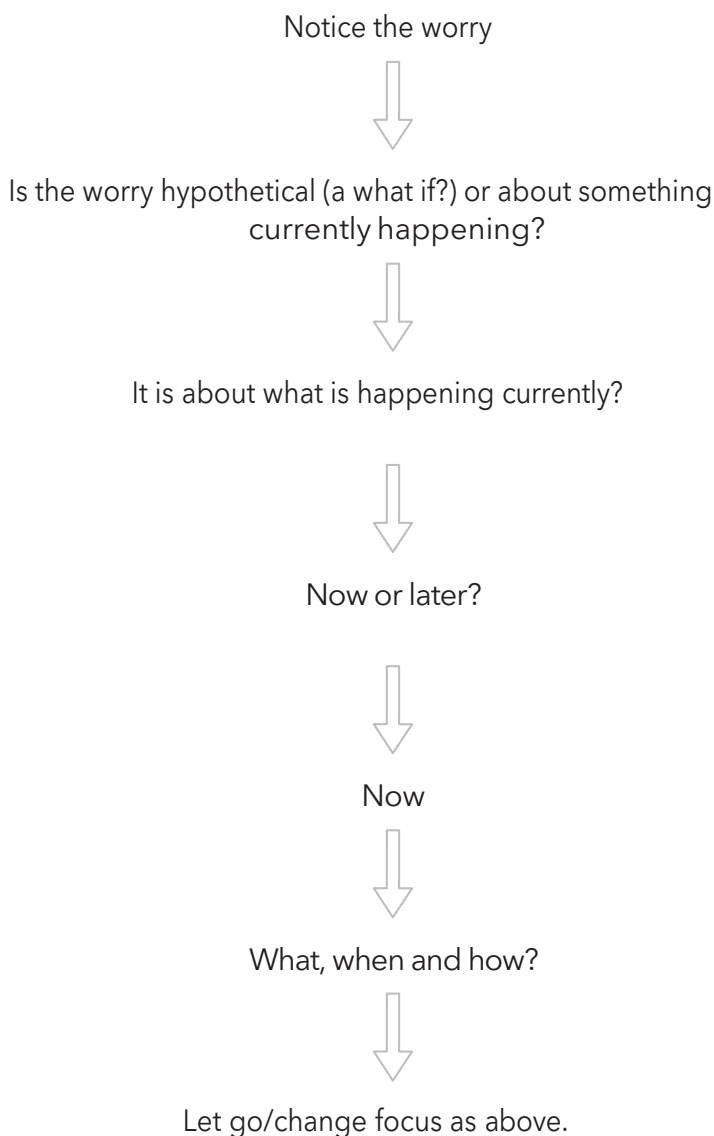
A:

C:

E:

30. The Worry Tree

This strategy is closely associated with a therapy type called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). It is a strategy which helps us to decide where our energy is best-placed to be useful in relation to thoughts we find difficult.



31. ACT Perspective Taking

This strategy is to do with representing your difficult thoughts visually (and possibly using audio too). Start by writing the thought down using colours, size and font that most represents how the thought looks in your mind. Below is an example:

I am to blame for the abuse!

As you can see, I used a big, dark coloured font and an exclamation mark to illustrate a thought many survivors tend to notice following abuse. With the colour and font size comes a tone of voice and volume when we read the thought. Notice that.

Below I have represented the same thought in quite a different visual way.



You will see that this time I made the font smaller, less scary in colour and attached to balloons representing letting go of the thought. I would like you to read it to yourself and notice how your tone of voice and volume is different. Notice the emotional change when you hold the second version of your thought in mind; there might be less fear, less tension, your breath might be calmer, your tone of voice might imply that the sentence is ridiculous. We are not ignoring your thoughts or pretending they are not there.

We are shaping them in a way that feels more manageable and possible to gradually let go/loosen the grip around.

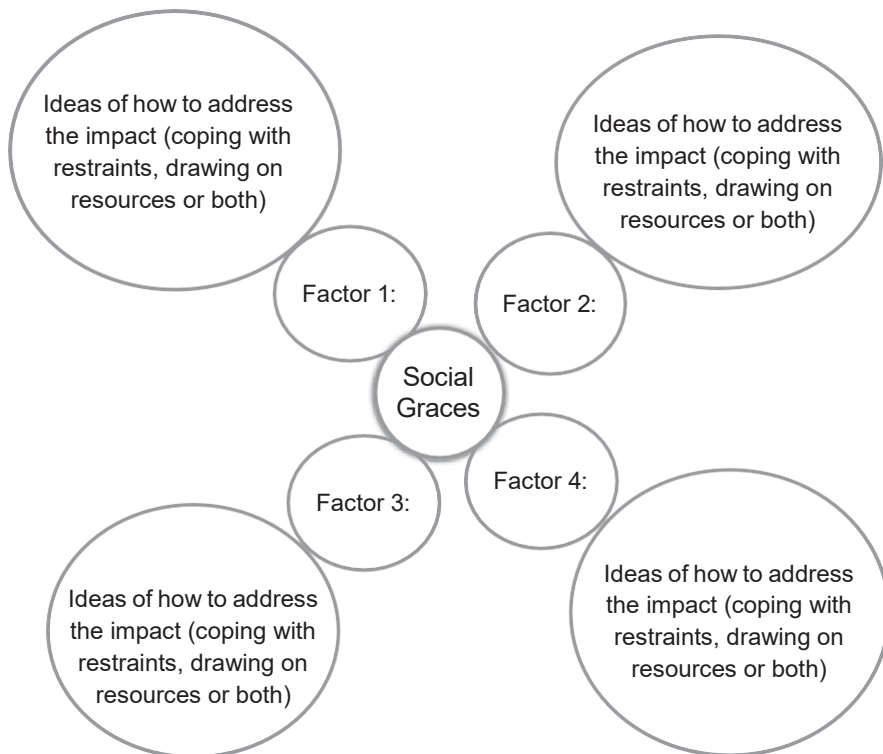
We all hold visual and/or audio representations of our thoughts in our minds. This strategy is the first step to noticing what happens visually and acoustically in our minds when we are struggling with emotions.

You may want to start practising this technique in front of a laptop or on your phone, so that you can easily and quickly change the visuals of your thought. With time, it is likely you will begin to be able to do it more instinctively in your imagination without anything tangible in front of you. As with anything, to practise helps to improve.

32. Social GGGRRAAAAACCCCEESSSS (I Wrote "GRACES" in the Diagram for Brevity) and Your Story of Migration and Grief

Remember to consider restraints/challenges as well as resources/enhancements while thinking about your grief and attending to it through the lens of Social GGGRRAAAAACCCCEESSSS (Burnham, 1992, 2012, 2025; Burnham, Palma and Whitehouse, 2008).

Gender • Gender identity • Geography • Race • Religion • Age
• Ability • Affiliation • Appearance • Accent • Class • Culture • Caste
• Education • Ethnicity • Economics • Sense • Spirituality • Sexuality • Sexual orientation (Burnham, 2012).



33. *List of ACT Values*

At the time of writing you can download this as a pdf from <https://thehappinesstrap.com/>

Below is a list of values published by creators of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. When I have used it for my reflections, I selected three top values I want to be informed by in my work and held them in mind when reflecting on various aspects of how I relate to my profession. I hope the list will prompt useful reflections for you too.

1. Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life, etc.
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
3. Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself
5. Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment, etc.
6. Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment, etc.
7. Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others
11. Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. Creativity: to be creative or innovative

15. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating, or thrilling
19. Fairness: to be fair to myself and others
20. Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself and others
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves
31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working and dedicated
32. Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself – emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others

37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to and curious about my here-and-now experience
38. Order: to be orderly and organized
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from others' points of view, and weigh evidence fairly
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others
43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organising
44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard
46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure the safety of myself or others
49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience
52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals
53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself
56. Skilfulness: to continually practise and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere and reliable
59. Insert your own unlisted value here:
60. Insert your own unlisted value here:

34. Positive Psychology, My Bereavement and My Wellbeing -
Action Plan

Action Plan
P
E
R
M
A

35. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Quality of Life Scale - Brief

This questionnaire, at the time of writing, can be found on WHO's website. It covers questions about the following domains of life: Physical, Psychological, Level of Independence, Social, Relationships, Environment, and Spirituality. The questions are about the last two weeks and so the questionnaire provides a snapshot of how you think you are doing at the moment. It is self-administered, so you do not need a professional to complete it.

In terms of interpreting the answers and what the scores mean, I would encourage you to focus on your individual answers and what you might want to do about them. You might not feel ready to answer the questions at the moment, yet reading them might give you pointers of which areas of your life you might want to focus your attention on the most to make a difference. You might choose to look at the questionnaire much later in your journey, or take a look now to give you an overview of how one's quality of life is thought about by WHO.

Alternatively, the questionnaire might inspire you to write your own personal list of questions or bullet points covering things that you would like to notice in yourself as you navigate your bereavement and look after yourself on the journey. Perhaps you will want to flick through this book again and jot down things that resonate the most in terms of thinking about your personal well-being. Below, I have given space for you to make those notes if you wish to.

*Your Own Questionnaire Capturing Your Coping to
Monitor Your Wellbeing.*

How will I know I have "coped"/I am doing okay?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

...