

Drew University

Spring symposium

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Navigating loss and grief
across the lifespan -
An interdisciplinary
perspective.

Prof Carlo Leget



Faces of loss and grief across the life span

Unpleasant

Painful

Unavoidable

Universal

Normal

Necessary

Important

Full of potential



Grief reactions

Cognitive

Altered sense of reality
Occupation with loss/deceased
Problems with memory and concentration
Sensory changes

Emotional

Despair, powerlessness, hopelessness
sadness, anxiety, fear
guilt, selfblame
anger, irritability
Numbness emptiness
loneliness, yearning, longing

Physical

Increase in stresshormones
Dysregulation of breathing, appetite, sleep
Decreased energy, fatigue, tension
Somatic complaints:
Dizziness, nausea, pains and aches
Immune response fails

Social

Crying, restlessness
hyperactivity
no interest in social contact
search behaviors
isolation, avoidance
rituals
challenges with communication

Spiritual

Why me/us?
Is it my fault?
Who am I now?
What do I want to do with my life?
What is the meaning of my life?
Which values are important to me?
What is my purpose?
Do I live my life as I want to?

Models in understanding death or grief

Stages of dying

(Kübler-Ross, 1969)

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Stages and tasks of grief

(Freud; Cullberg, 1980, Worden 1984)

Accept the reality

Process the emotional pain

Adjust to the new reality

Embark on new life



Grief closure/reactions are put behind us

Continuing bonds (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1999)

We don't let go.
We look for ways to continue
the relationship through
memories and rituals.

It is helpful to find a way to
emotional connectedness with
the lost.

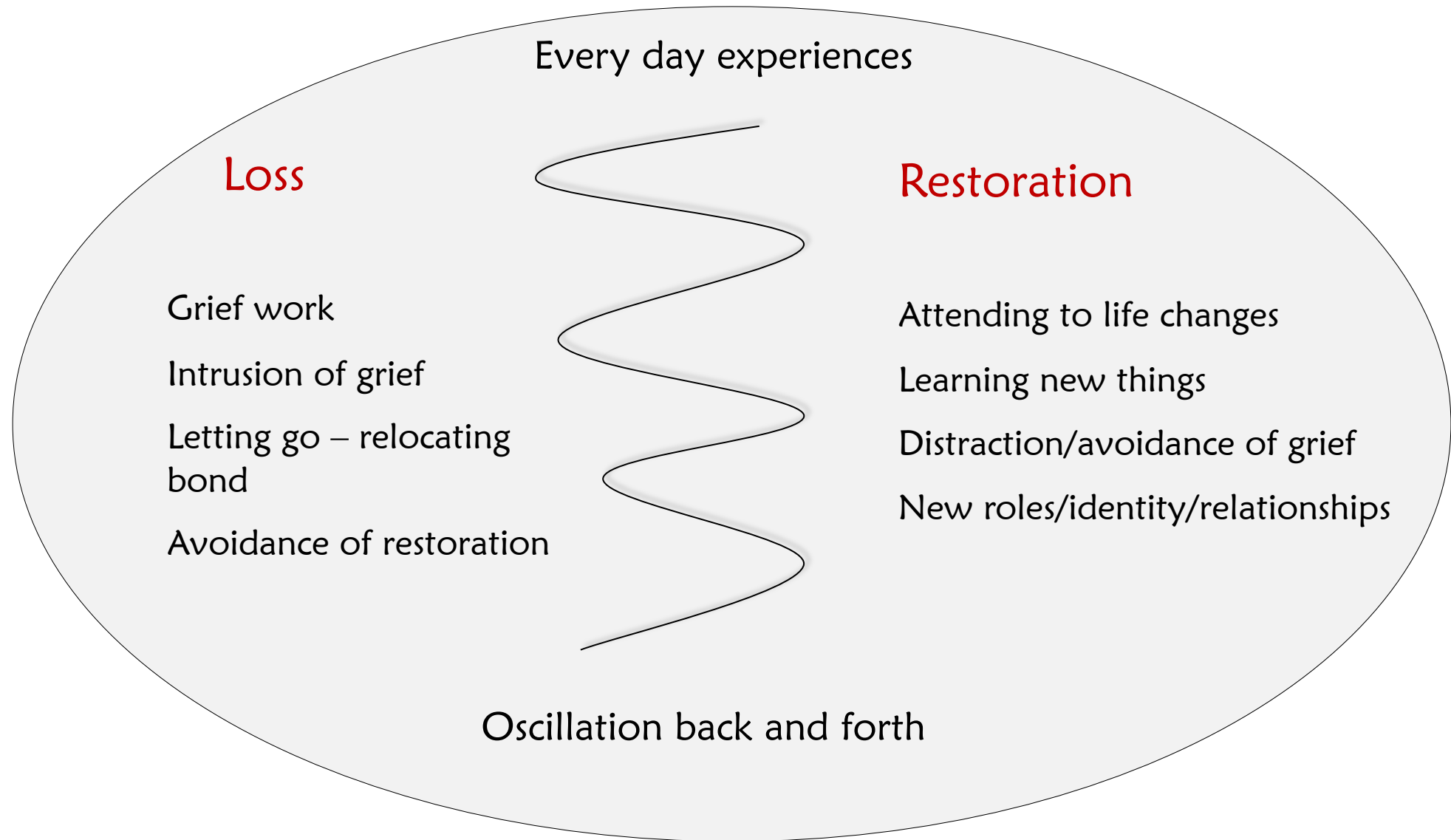
Connectedness supports the
person's self understanding
and finding a way forward



Banksy



Dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999)



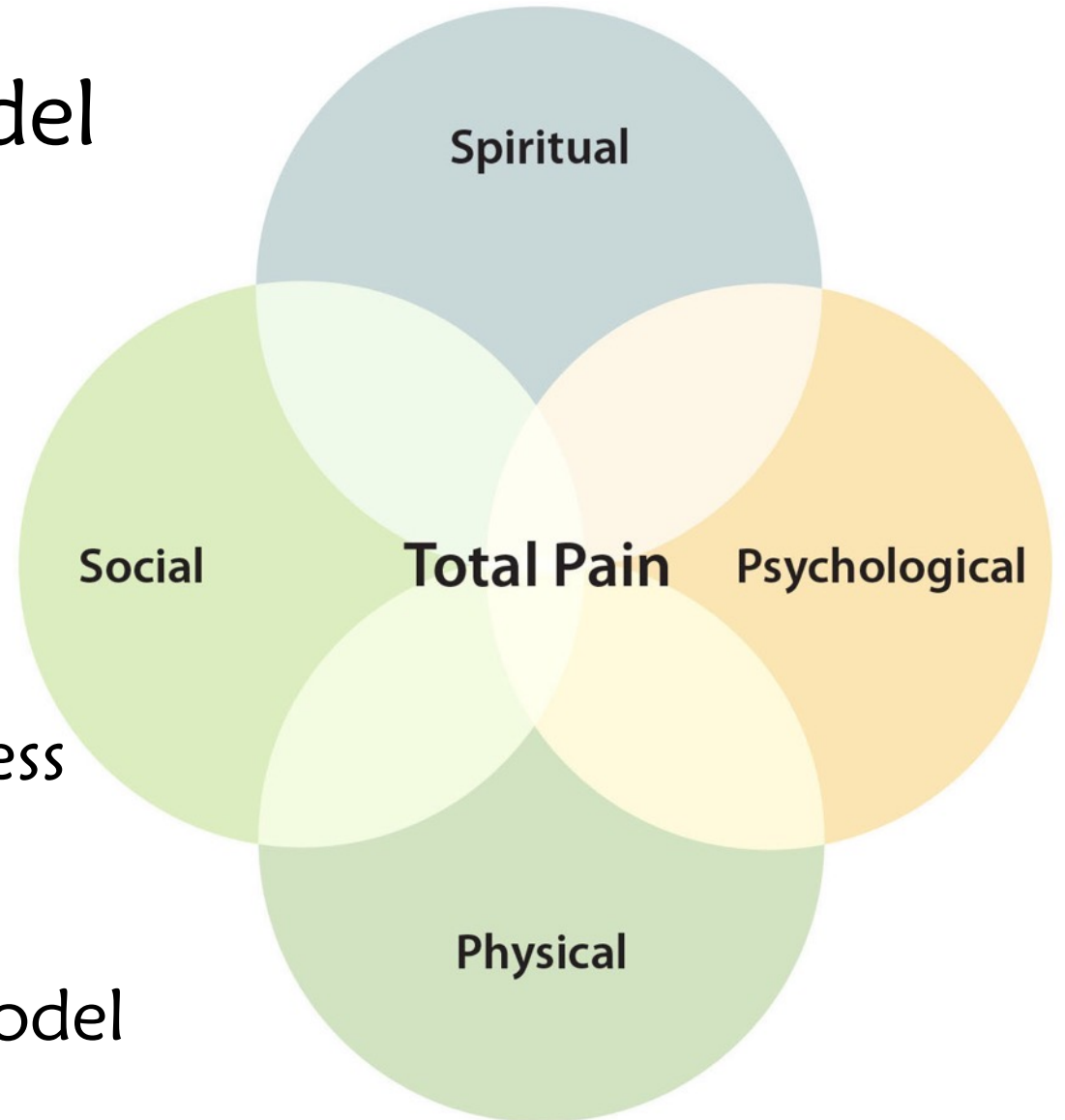
A narrowed understanding of grief

- 1) Not all losses are acknowledged and researched
- 2) Dominant grief models are from one single discipline: psychology
- 3) The existential dimension of grief is underdeveloped
- 4) The different dimensions of grief are not integrated



The Integrative Process Model of loss and grief

- Saunders (1967): Total pain
- Yalom (1980): Ultimate concerns
- Bowlby (1980): Phases
- Worden (1991): Tasks
- Stroebe & Schut (1999): Dual Process Model
- Leget (2012): Diamond model
- Guldin (2018): Grief facilitation model



“Where is
sorrow, there is
holy ground”
(Oscar Wilde)

Grief always honors a loss.

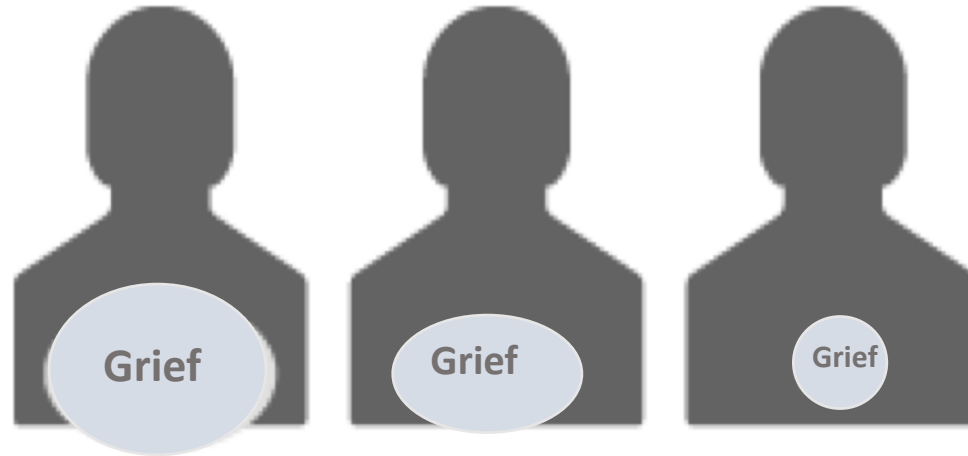
A grieving person is trying to
show us what the loss means to
them.

If we can meet the grieving
person in their struggle, we can
provide support and prevent
further suffering.

How to
live
with grief

We are not looking for a way to get away from grief. We are looking for a way into the grief.

When we can be in contact with our grief, we can learn to live with the losses in our life.



We develop with grief and grow to integrate grief in our lives, thoughts, and emotions. Some persons even feel existential transformation



Grief as an existential experience

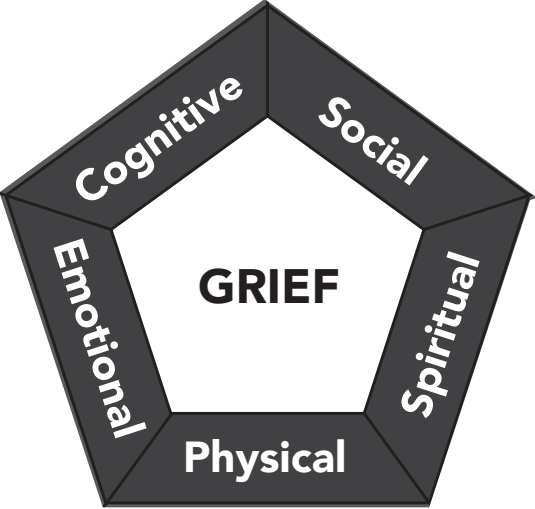
“Living an authentic and free
human life, in honesty and
connectedness with yourself
and other beings”

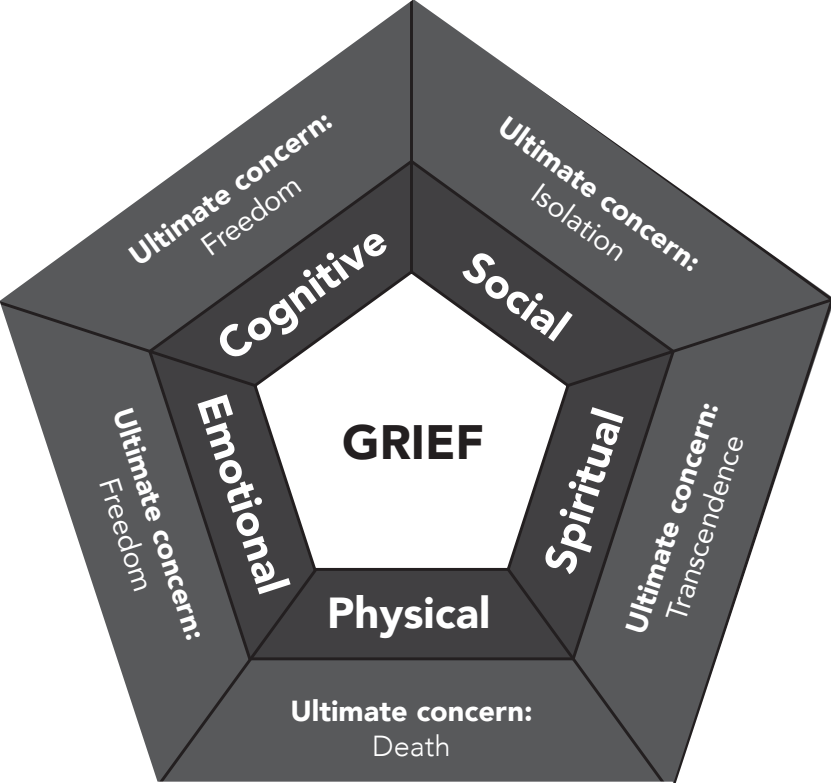


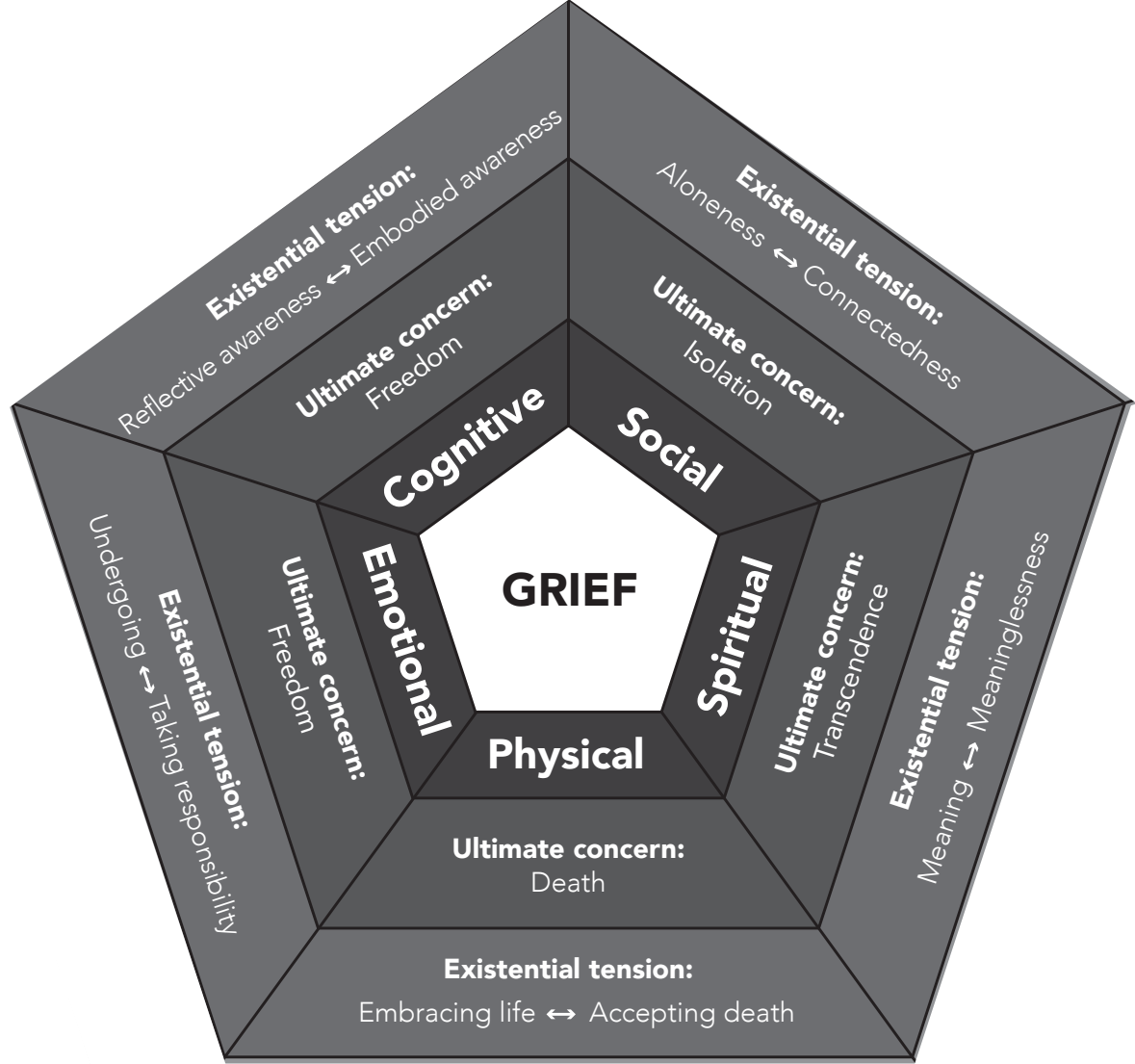
Death – Freedom – Isolation - Meaning

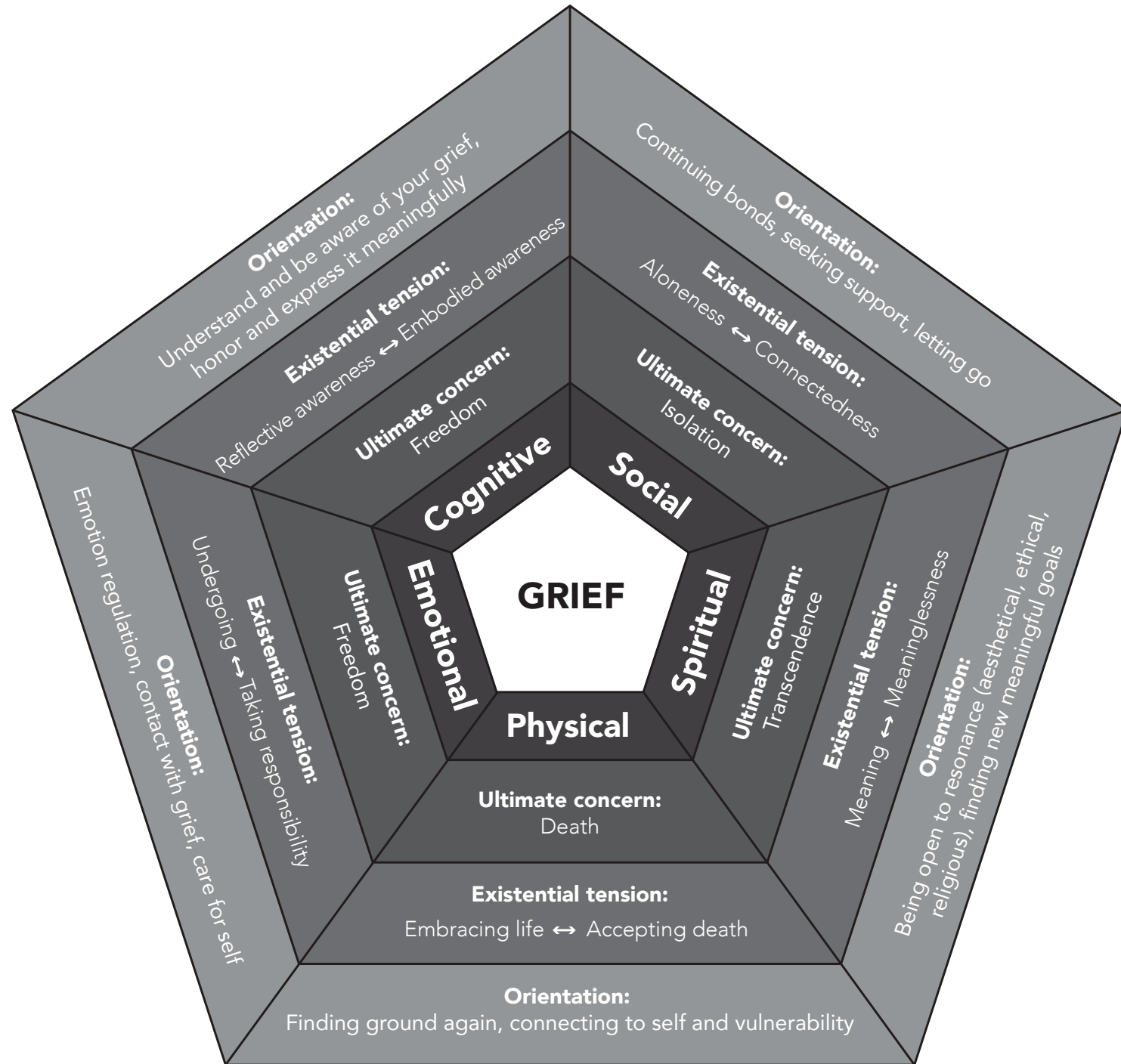
Four ‘ultimate concerns’

The “givens of existence,” or an “inescapable part” of being human, that every person must come to terms with through active choices to realize their individual potential (Yalom 1980)







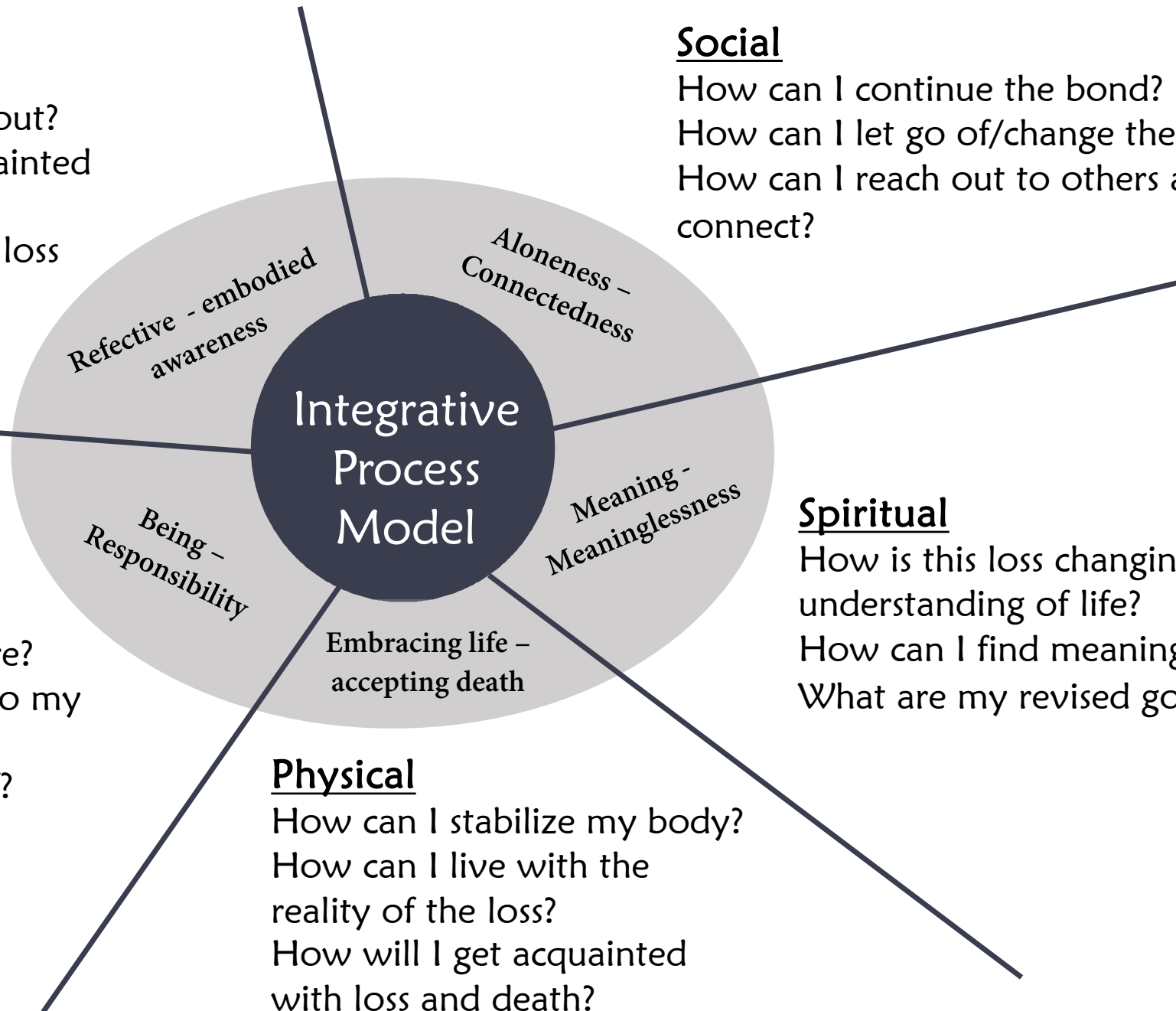


Cognitive

What is my grief about?
How can I get acquainted with my grief?
How can I grieve this loss meaningfully?

Social

How can I continue the bond?
How can I let go of/change the bond?
How can I reach out to others and connect?



Integrative Process Model

Reflective - embodied awareness

Aloneness - Connectedness

Meaning - Meaninglessness

Embracing life - accepting death

Being - Responsibility

Emotional

How can I practice self-care?
How/when do I connect to my grief?
How can I honor my grief?

Spiritual

How is this loss changing my understanding of life?
How can I find meaning again?
What are my revised goals in life?

Physical

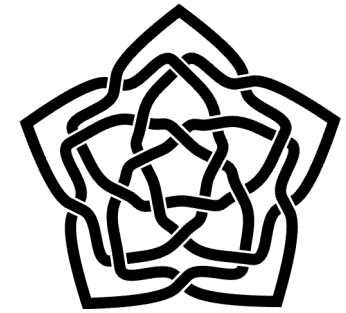
How can I stabilize my body?
How can I live with the reality of the loss?
How will I get acquainted with loss and death?

Messages for an informed practice

- Loss and grief come in many shapes and forms during our lives
- Grief is a form of love and a testimony of a meaningful connectedness (“Where is sorrow, there is holy ground”)
- Because of its meaningfulness grief can be a window to existential awareness
- Navigating loss and grief across the life span, is an invitation to face the ultimate concerns in life: death, freedom, isolation, meaning and transcendence



Thank you for your attention



Center for Grief
& Existential Values

Mai-Britt Guldin & Carlo Leget (2023)
The integrated process model of loss and grief –
An interprofessional understanding, *Death Studies*,
DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2023.2272960](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2023.2272960)