

THE ACT OF
GRIEVING

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March 2025



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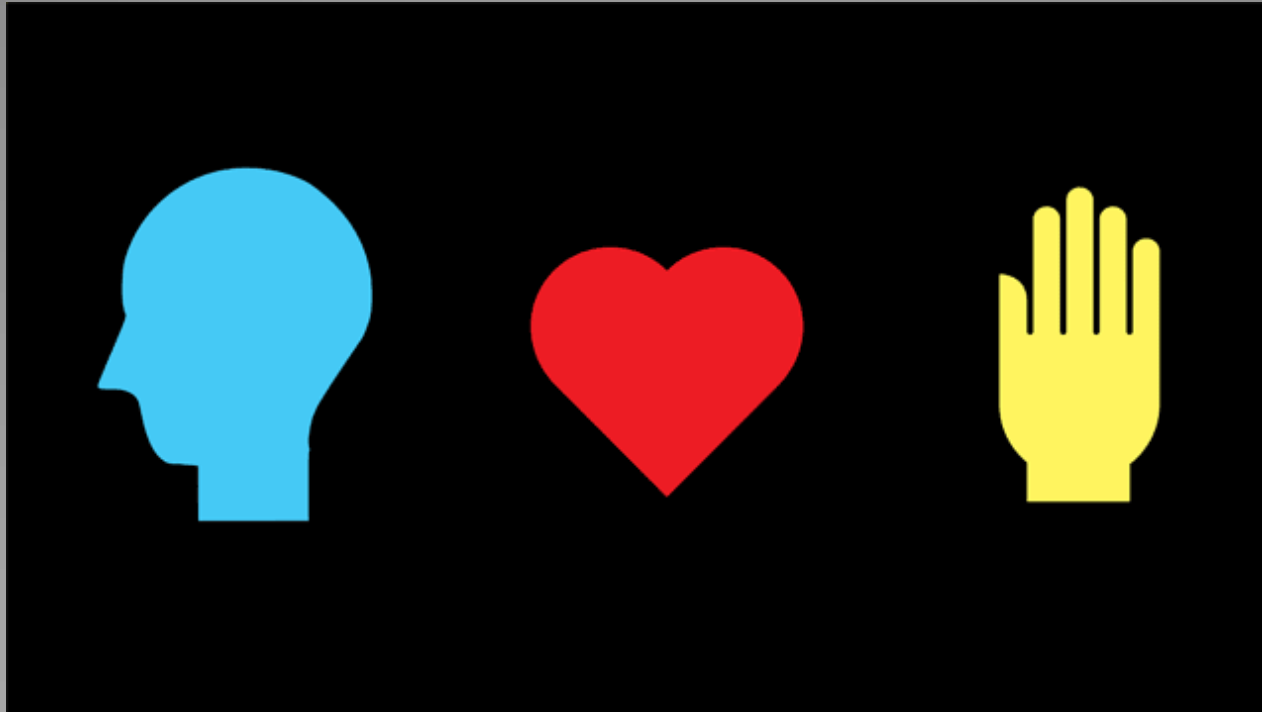


HEREFORDSHIRE



Outline

- What do we mean by grief? (phenomenology)
- Main models of grief & relation to CBS
- Core ACT theory & skills in grief support
- Specific issues



Arriving

How to Arrive

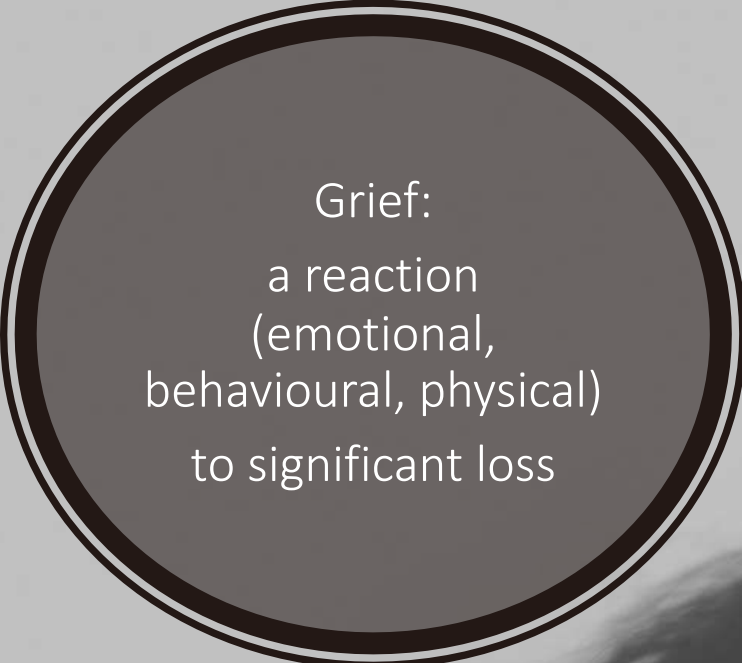
- One thing I see
 - One thing I hear
 - Ground under my feet
 - Feel one breath
- Come into this moment
- What am I aiming to achieve in this action?
 - Accepting agendas may need to change
- Set your intention
- Why does it matter to me to do this?
 - How do I want to be in doing this?
- Connect to your values
- what difficult thoughts & feelings are likely to show up for me in doing this?
 - Am I willing to experience them, if that's what it takes to achieve a valued outcome?
- Engage your willingness

Two key questions

- What's happening?
- What can I do?

What is grief?





Grief:
a reaction
(emotional,
behavioural, physical)
to significant loss



Losses such as...



Loss of a loved person

Loss of a pet



Loss of a job



Loss of a role



Loss of youth, health, function



Loss of a whole way of life





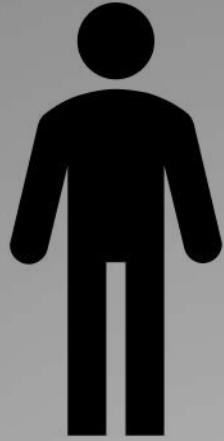
The risk of Love is Loss
& the price of Loss is Grief

Hilary Stanton Zunin

TYPES OF GRIEF

**NORMAL GRIEF
SECONDARY LOSS
COMPLICATED GRIEF
CHRONIC GRIEF
ABSENT GRIEF
CUMULATIVE GRIEF
DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF
ANTICIPATORY MOURNING**





Think of a
person..

Pete



Pete

- 58 year-old man
- 32 year-old daughter Alison died 7 months ago,
 - long illness (cancer of the cervix)
 - Pete very involved in supporting Alison & her family throughout
 - Alison sometimes resentful, felt he was TOO involved
 - Death perceived as sudden and traumatic
 - Some sort of bleed into brain led to death, acted very oddly and aggressively towards Pete
 - arguments with family about whether Alison should be taken to hospital / brought home

Pete

– Thoughts

- Frequent recall of final 48 hours, especially key moments
- Wondering if should have done different things
- Difficulty concentrating at work and at home – making mistakes
- Occasional suicidal thoughts – says won't act on them

– Emotions

- Waves of sadness, guilt, occasional anger at Alison
- Not enjoying life 'at all'

– Sensations

- Emptiness in gut
- Heaviness across shoulders
- Tightness in chest

– Behaviour

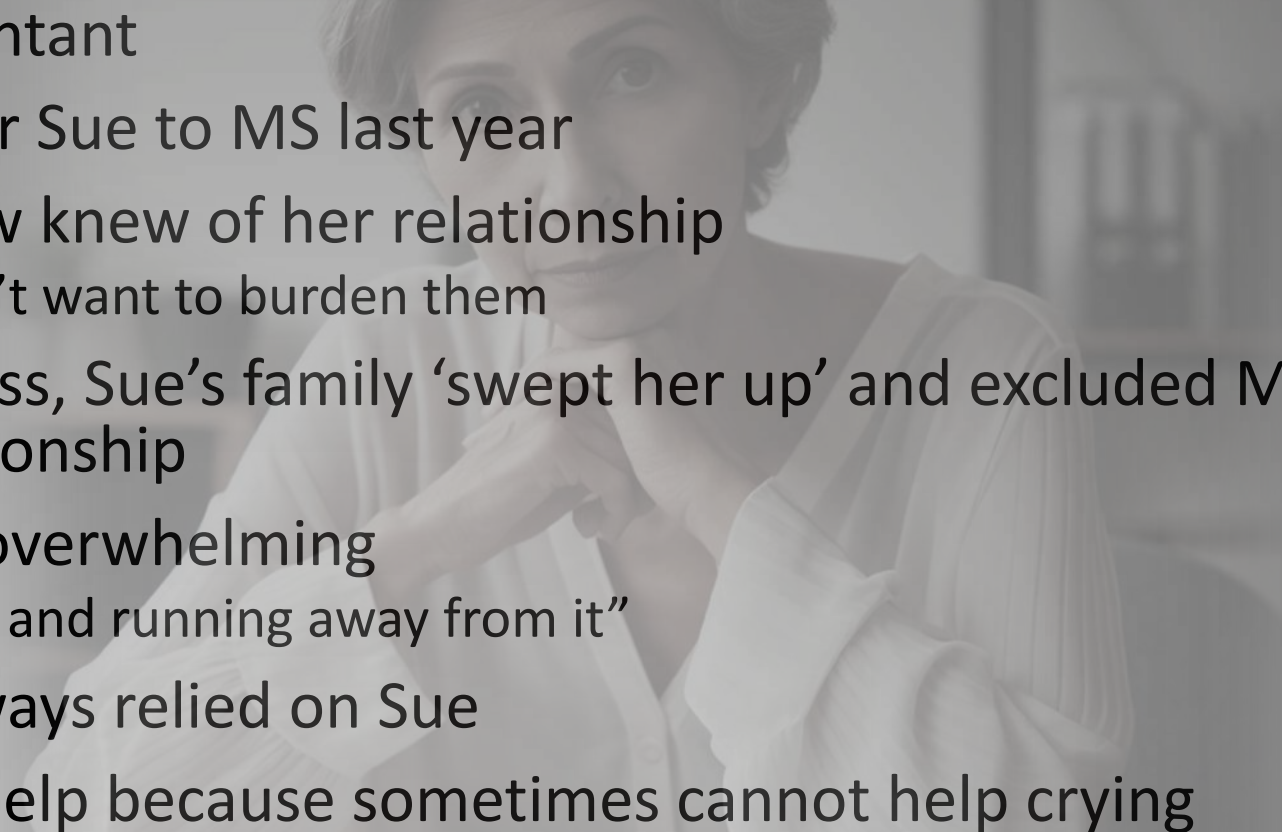
- Wife reports distant and withdrawn
- Loses temper easily
- Preoccupation with memories of Alison's childhood
- Drinking more alcohol



Think of a person..

- Who are they?
- Who (or what) did they lose?
- What were the circumstances of the loss?
- Thoughts, Feelings, sensations of grief
- Behaviours of grief

Mira

- 62 year old, retired accountant
 - Lost her long-term partner Sue to MS last year
 - Always private person, few knew of her relationship
 - Family distant, Mira doesn't want to burden them
 - In last stages of Sue's illness, Sue's family 'swept her up' and excluded Mira – never approved of relationship
 - Finds loneliness and loss overwhelming
 - "I alternate wallowing in it and running away from it"
 - Can't plan for future – always relied on Sue
 - Back at work now, seeks help because sometimes cannot help crying
- 

Relevant factors

About the
grieving person

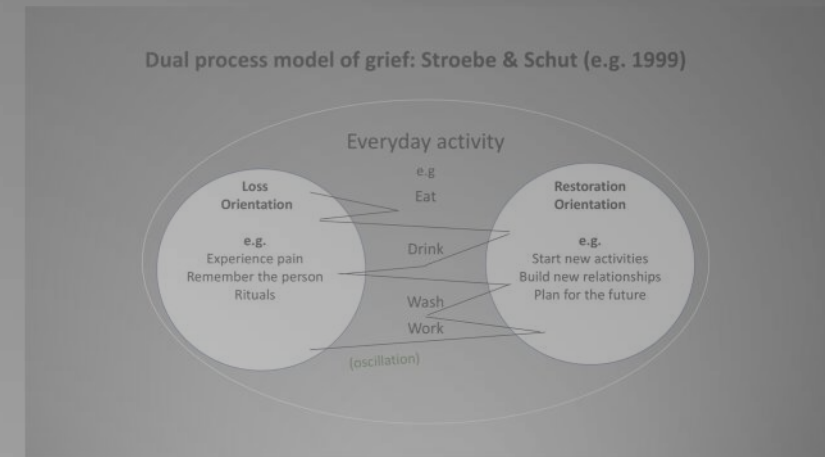
About the
relationship

About the
deceased

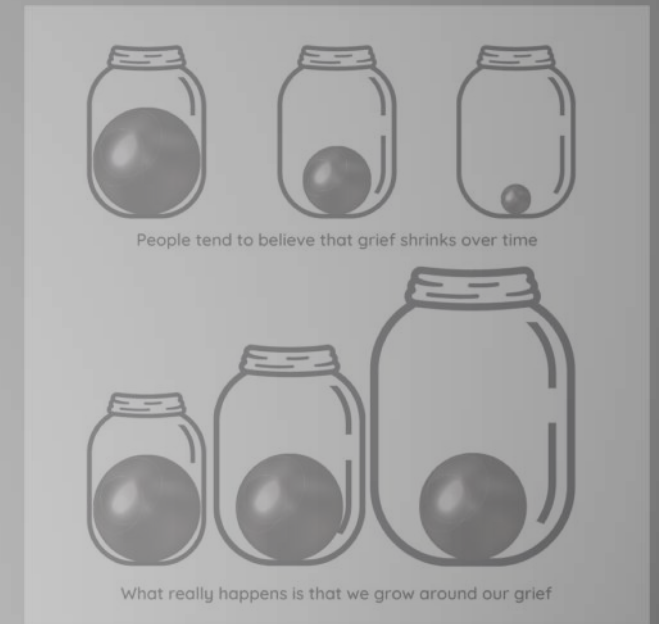
About the death

Jade

- 20 year old footballer, club contract, England U19
- Knee injury (ACL rupture)
 - surgery, out for 8 months
 - happened again, career over
- “Been my whole life since I was 7, now it’s gone”
- “If I’m not a footballer, I’m nothing”
- “Miss everything about it”
 - friendship, structure, support purpose, excitement, competence, status, career path, ”
- Mood low, lacking motivation



Some models of grief



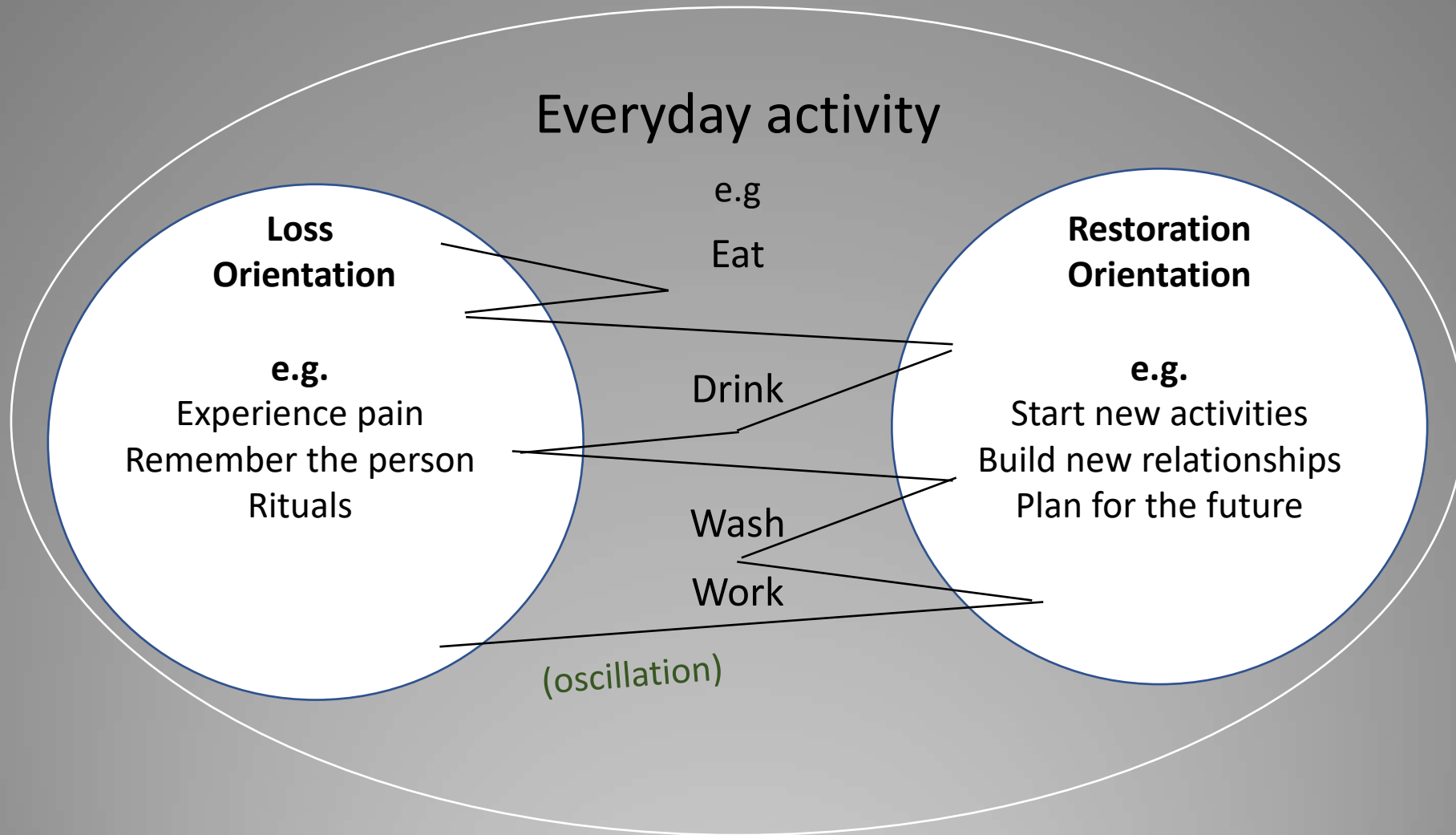
'Phase' models of grief

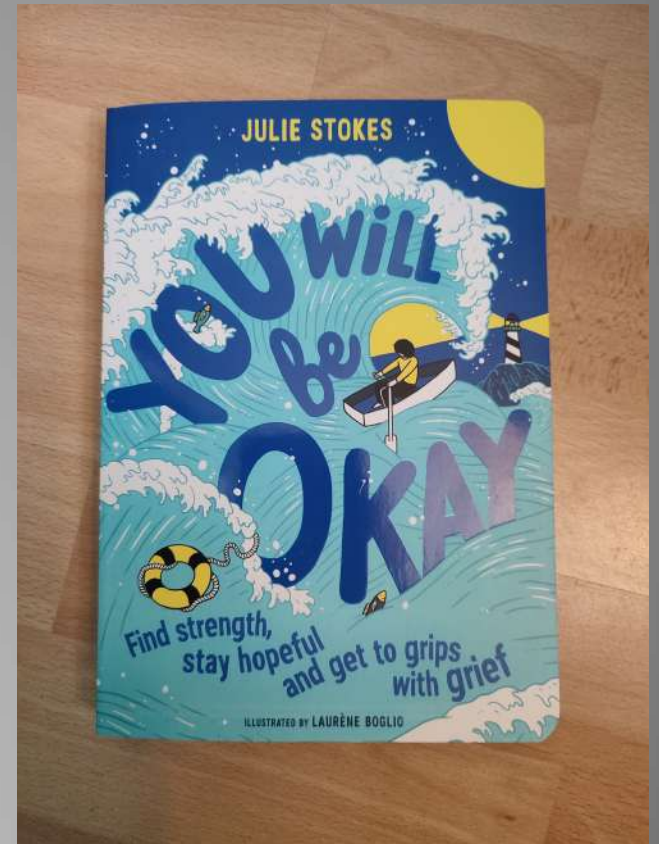
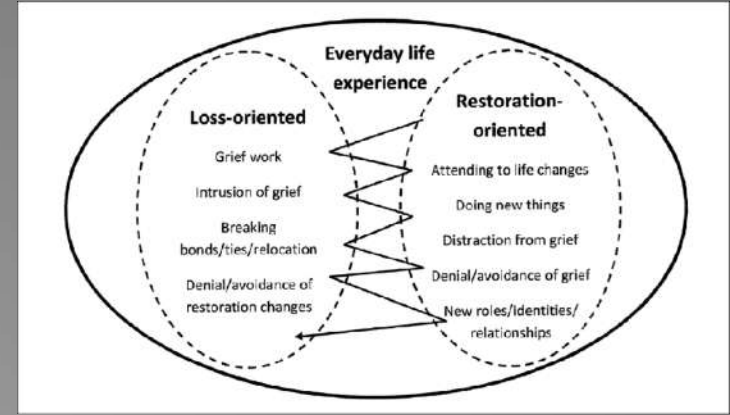
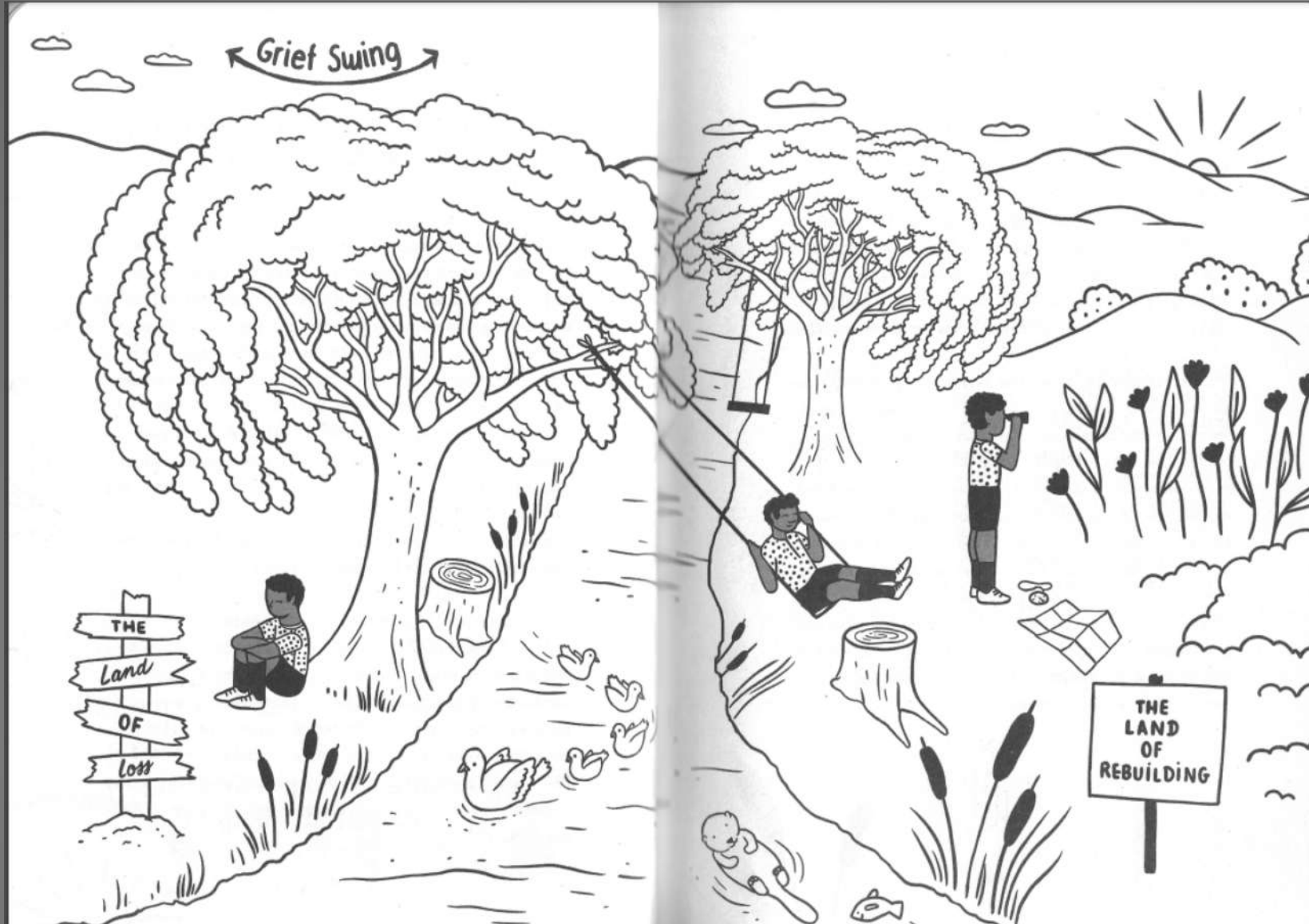
Kubler-Ross	<i>Denial</i>	<i>Anger</i>	<i>Bargaining</i>	<i>Depression</i>	<i>Acceptance</i>
Murray-Parkes	<i>Shock & Numbness</i>	<i>Yearning & Searching</i>	<i>Disorganisation & Despair</i>	<i>Reorganisation</i>	

'Task' model of grief – William Worden (1983 -)

Task 1	Accepting the reality of the loss
Task 2	Experiencing the pain of grief
Task 3	Adjust to an environment from which the deceased person is missing
Task 4	Invest emotional energy in building new life*

Dual process model of grief: Stroebe & Schut (e.g. 1999)





From "You Will be OK" (2021) Julie Stokes, Illus. Laurene Boglio

Continuing Bonds: Silverman & Klass (1996)

- We do not 'get over' a significant loss
- We do not 'let go' of that person
- Successful grieving involves 'renegotiating the relationship' with the person who has died
 - It becomes a purely *internal* relationship

Tonkin (1996) Growth metaphor



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

image from TheRalphSite

Neimeyer: Meaning Making Model of Grief (99)

- Active Narrative Construction
- Integration of Past Present Future
- Transformation of Pain

What helps?

compassion



companionship



practical support



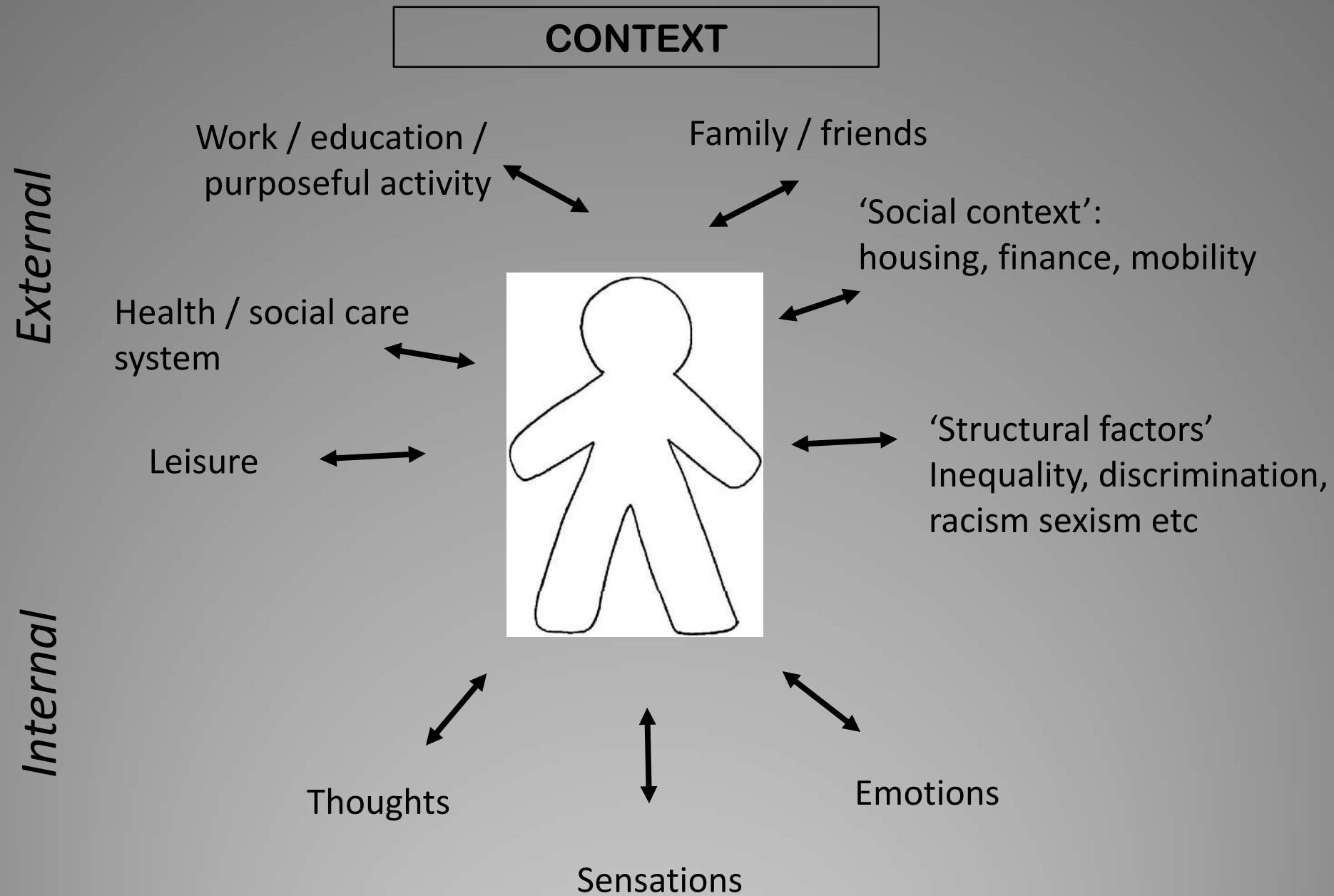
Meaningful ritual

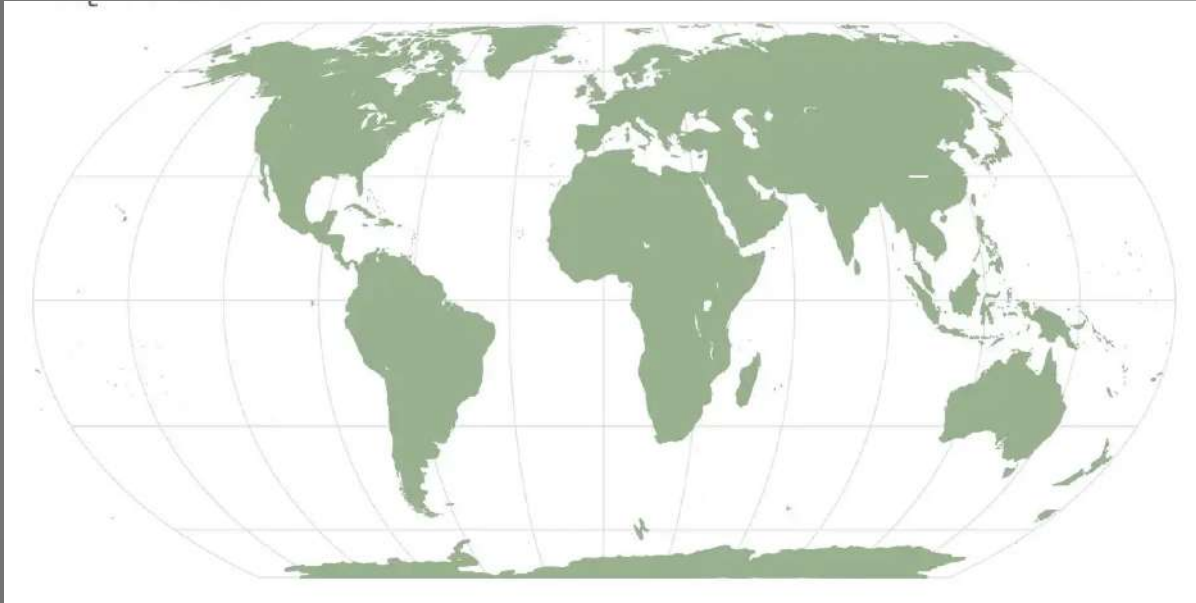
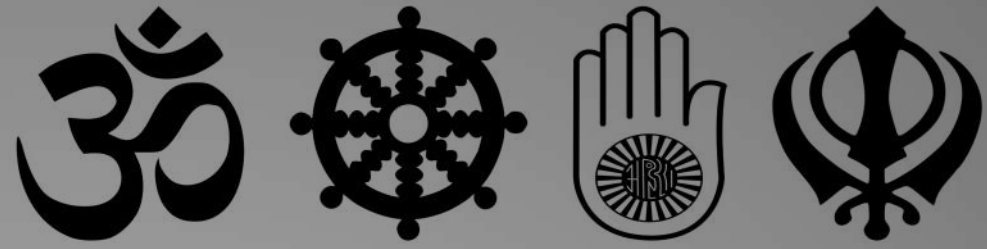


Getting to the ACT

Why would ACT be relevant?

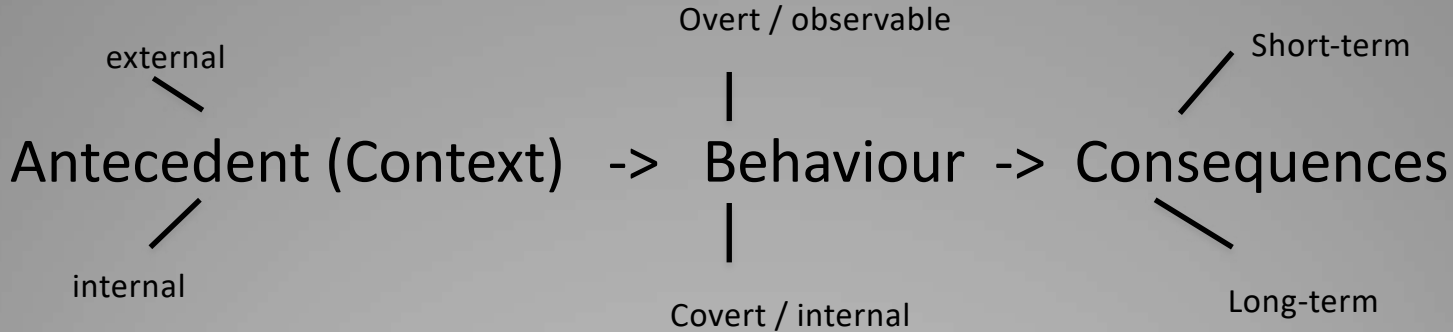
- Pain of grief seems inevitable, not easily 'fixable'
- People often become stuck on thoughts and memories
- Sometimes manage emotions by unhelpful actions
- Product of a changed context
- Involves purpose and meaning
- Self-concept





Basic behavioural principles

A -> B -> C



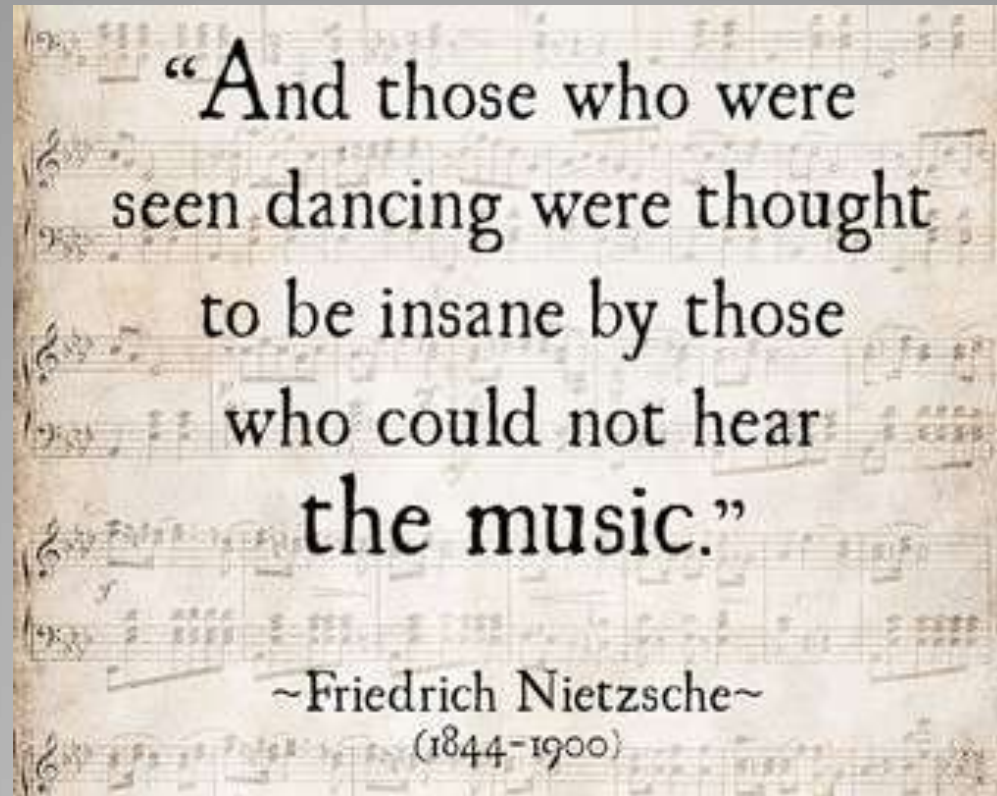
WTF?

How humans* are different

*

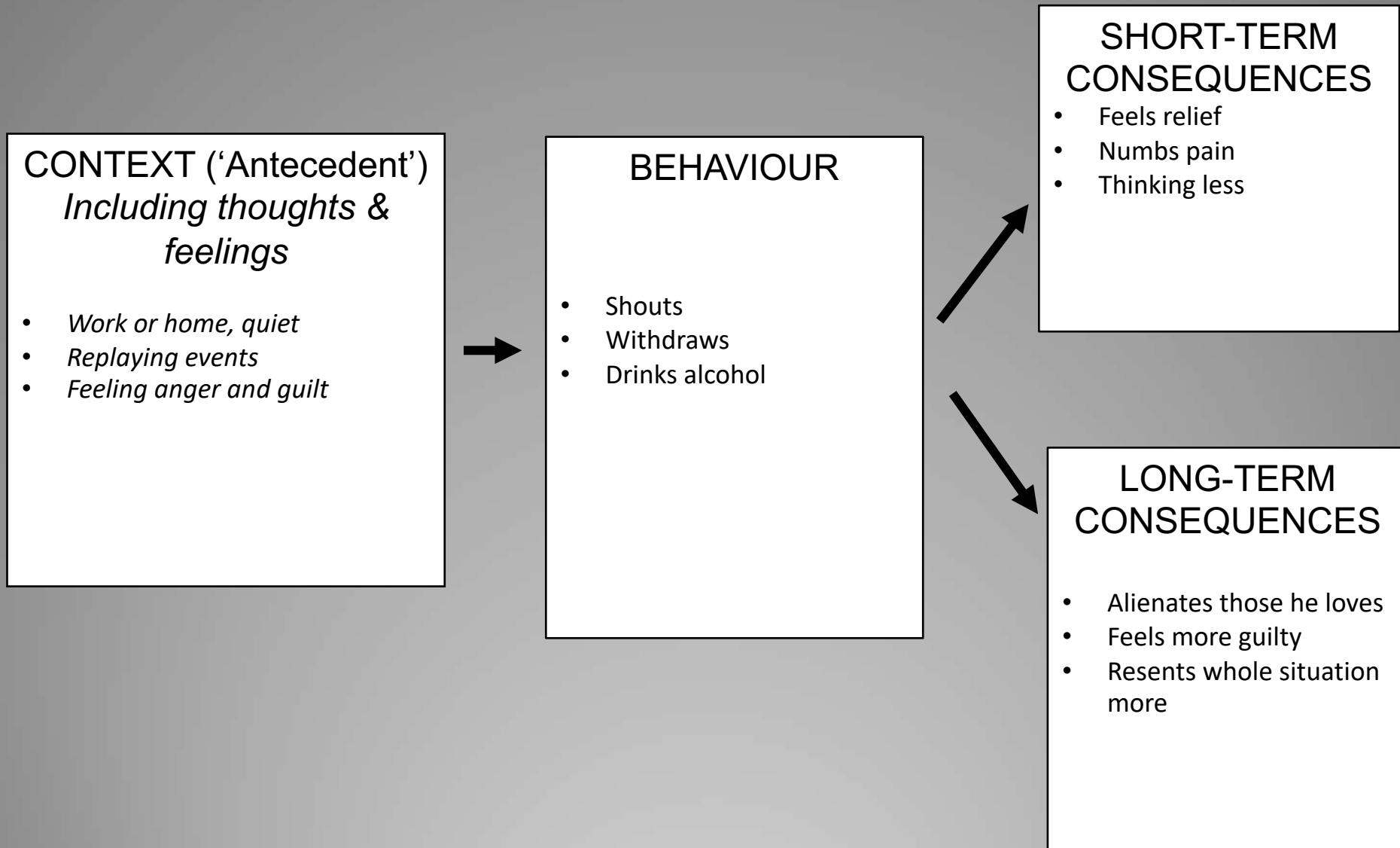
Context & Function

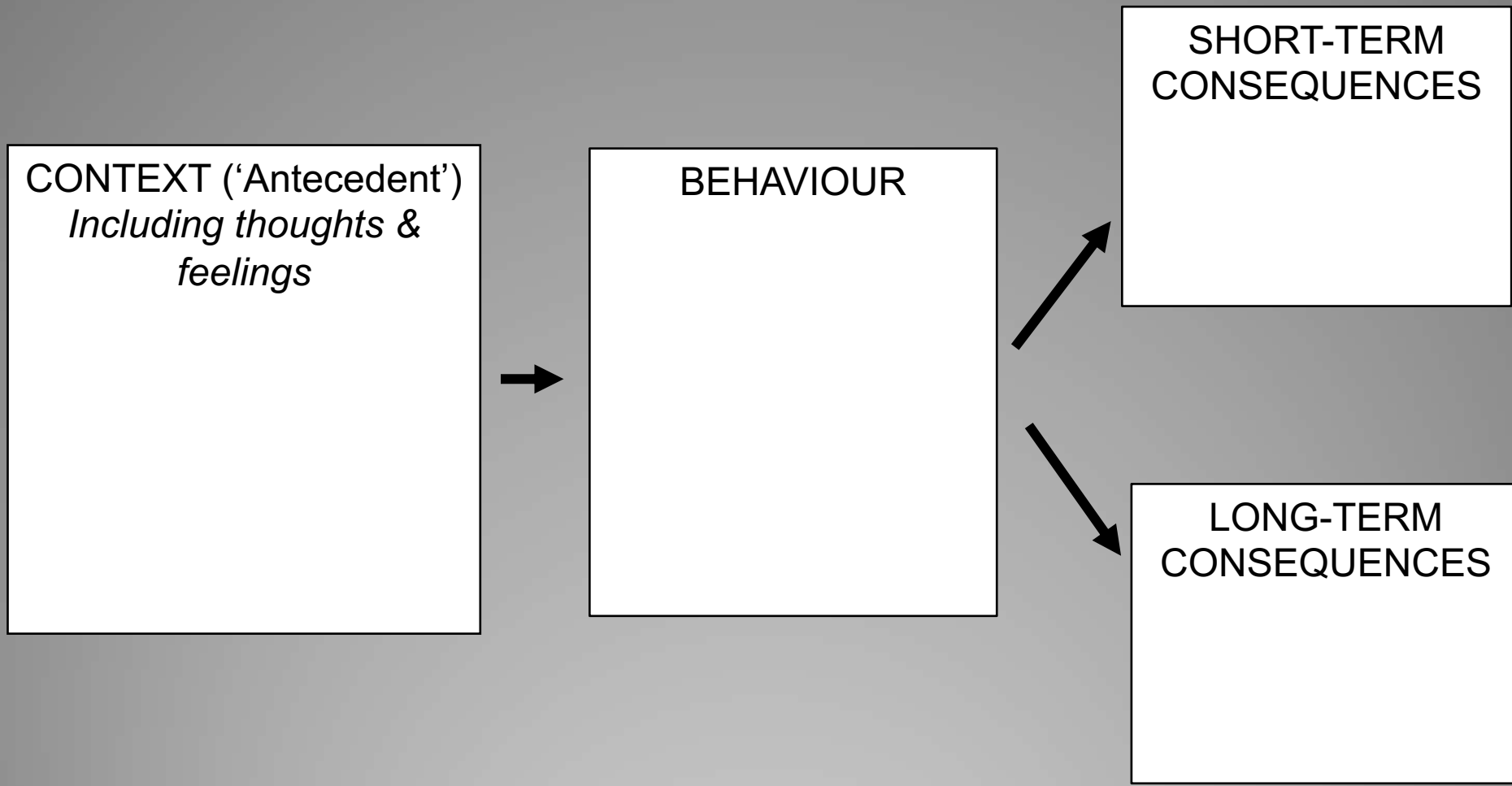
We cannot understand someone's behaviour without taking account of its CONTEXT and its CONSEQUENCES (actual or intended)



Pete

- Thoughts
 - Frequent recall of final 48 hours, especially key moments
 - Wondering if should have done different things
 - Difficulty concentrating at work and at home – making mistakes
 - Occasional suicidal thoughts – says won't act on them
- Emotions
 - Waves of sadness, guilt, occasional anger at Alison
 - Not enjoying life 'at all'
- Sensations
 - Emptiness in gut
 - Heaviness across shoulders
 - Tightness in chest
- Behaviour
 - Wife reports distant and withdrawn
 - Loses temper easily
 - Preoccupation with memories of Alison's childhood
 - Drinking more alcohol

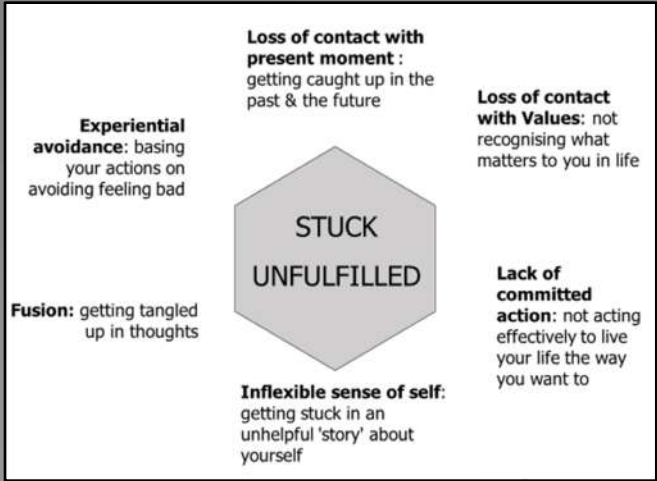




Function analysis / Functional assessment

The questions to ask yourself

- What is this person *doing*?
 - What is the *context* they are doing this in?
 - What are the short-term *consequences* of it?
 - What are the longer-term *consequences* of it?
-
- Hence, WTF: What's the function of this behaviour



Context

- external situation
- Internal :thoughts, feelings, sensations urges etc



Behaviour 1

Consequences

Long Term

Short Term

Less workable

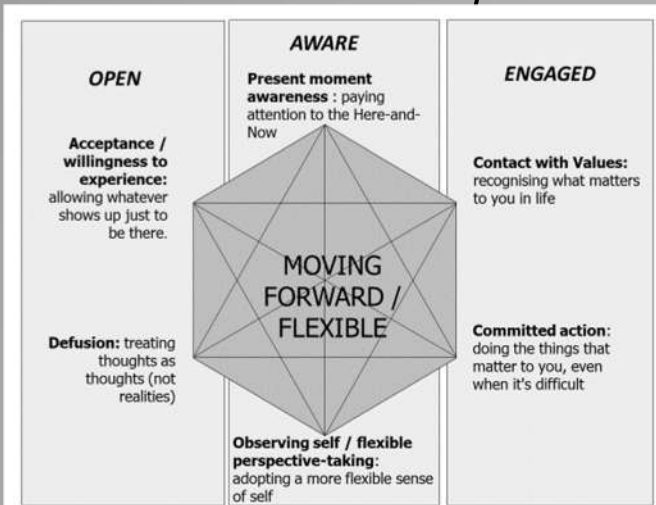
Behaviour 2

Consequences

Long Term

Short Term

More workable



Experiential avoidance:

Drinking to numb feelings

Avoiding situations he finds stressful

Shouting when feels bad ('lets off steam')

Fusion:

I should have done more

Why did she reject me?

It's so unfair

Life's horrible now

Loss of contact with present moment:

Thinking of Alison's childhood

Recalling events around her death

Not engaged in here and now

Loss of contact with Values:
Life seems pointless

Meaning attached only to lost person

-cannot see in other activities

STUCK

UNFULFILLED

INFLEXIBLE

Lack of committed action:

Reduced activities

Withdrawal

Poor persistence

Inflexible sense of self/
stuck in a story

Failed as father

My life is ruined

External context?
I

External behaviour?

Short-term consequences?

What context?

What behaviour?

What consequences?

Workability?

Internal context?

Internal behaviour?

Long-term consequences?

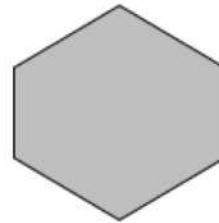
Functional Analysis

Psychological Inflexibility

Experiential avoidance

Loss of contact with here-and-now

Distant from Values



Fusion

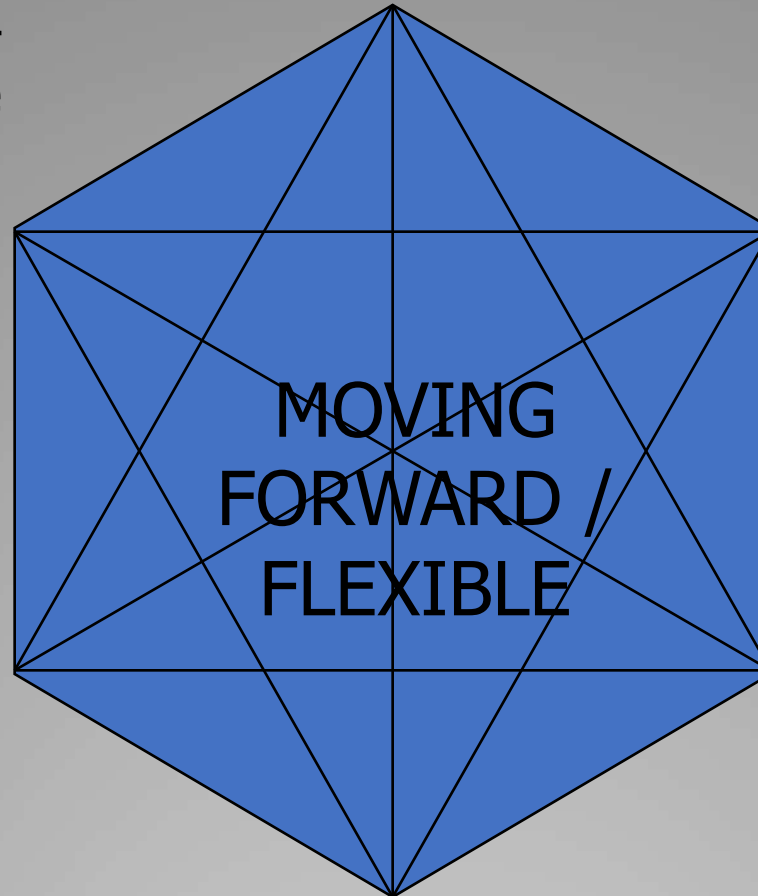
Inflexible self-stories, rules

Lack of committed action

Acceptance / willingness to experience:
allowing whatever shows up just to be there.

Present moment awareness : paying attention to the Here-and-Now

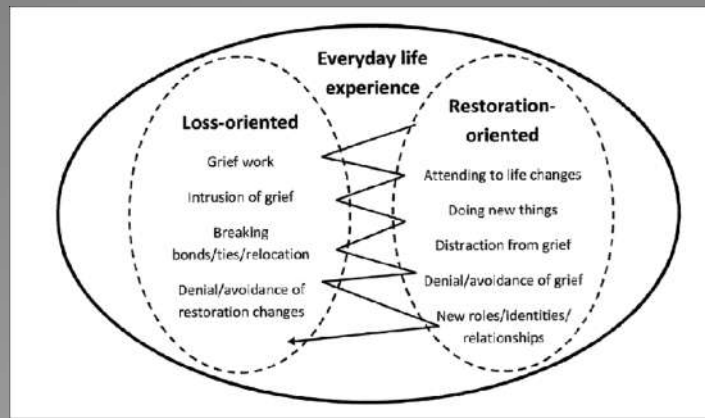
Contact with Values: recognising what matters to you in life



Defusion: treating thoughts as thoughts (not realities)

Committed action: doing the things that matter to you, even when it's difficult

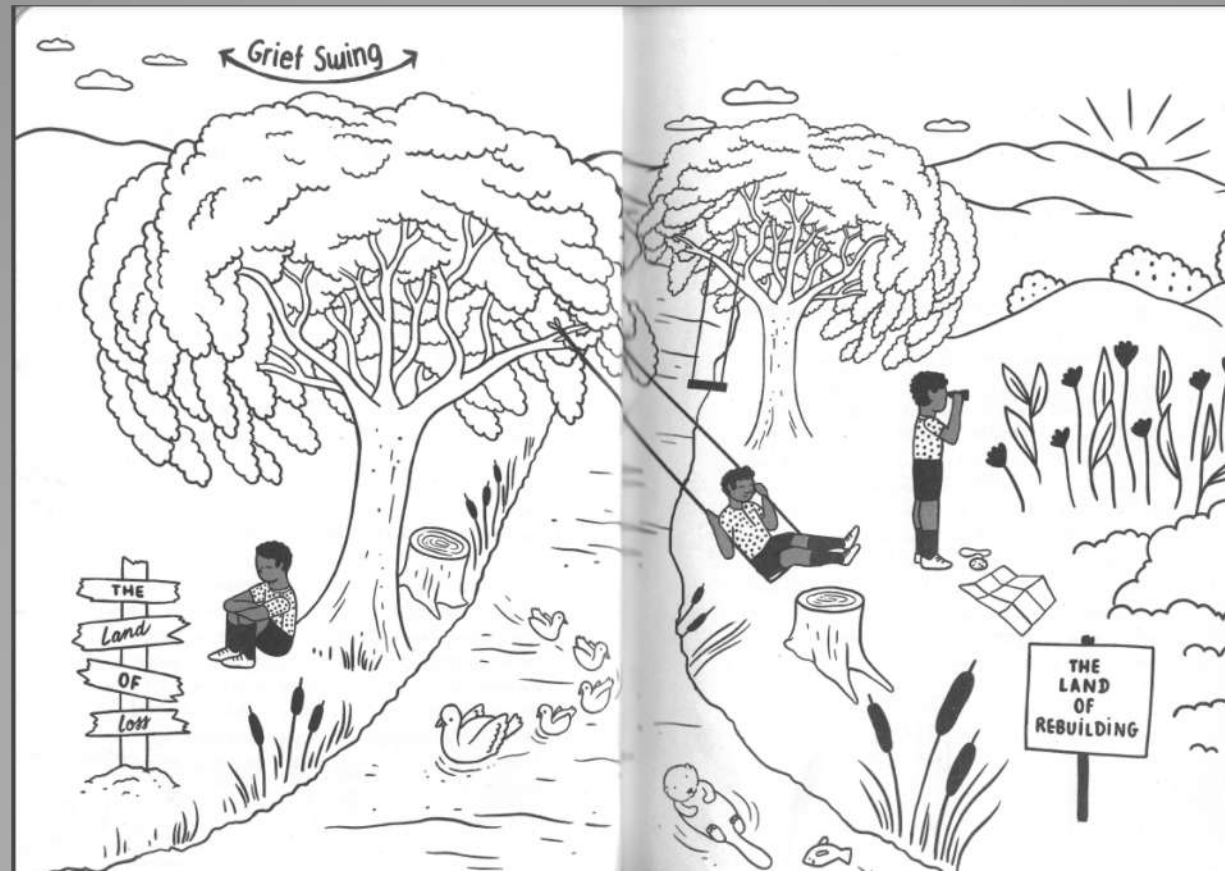
Observing self / flexible perspective-taking: adopting a more flexible sense of self



Present moment awareness
Flexible perspective taking

Acceptance / making room for pain

Defusion



Values awareness

Committed action

ACT interventions in grief

Some favourites

Two sides of the same coin



VALUES

PAIN

Two sides of the same coin



LOVE

SORROW

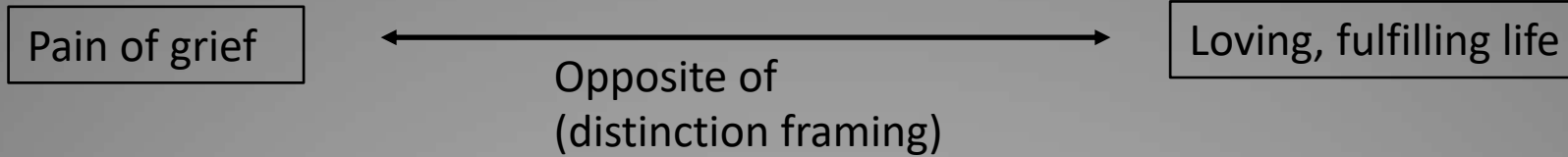


But what is grief,
if not love persevering?

Perspective Taking Committed Action

- The time-machine question...
- Emphasise willingness to have this pain, if that's the price of the love



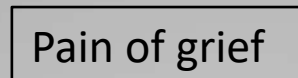


Rule: to move *towards* better life, move *away* from pain of grief

...therefore suppress thoughts, avoid situations, drink alcohol



Part of
(hierarchical framing)



Make room for the pain of grief in order to have a loving, fulfilling life
..therefore engage in valued activities in presence of painful thoughts and feelings

Making room for
difficult thoughts and
feelings





An empty chair



- Many possible uses
- Here, 'what would they do'
- Can't predict what they say
- Enacting better than asking
- Can also be conflict, guilt, unspoken
- Can be ongoing benefit
- Doing Dual Process AND Continuing bonds



Precautions..

- Getting agreement
- Being clear this about client's memories and mental model, NOT about spiritual / reality
- Careful if you know leads to *overwhelming* emotion
- Not near the end of the session
- Not single session
- Don't have to *go along with* what their opinion would be
 - More generally not infallible
 - If your experience was unpleasant, might be now



The
impact
of grief
on us

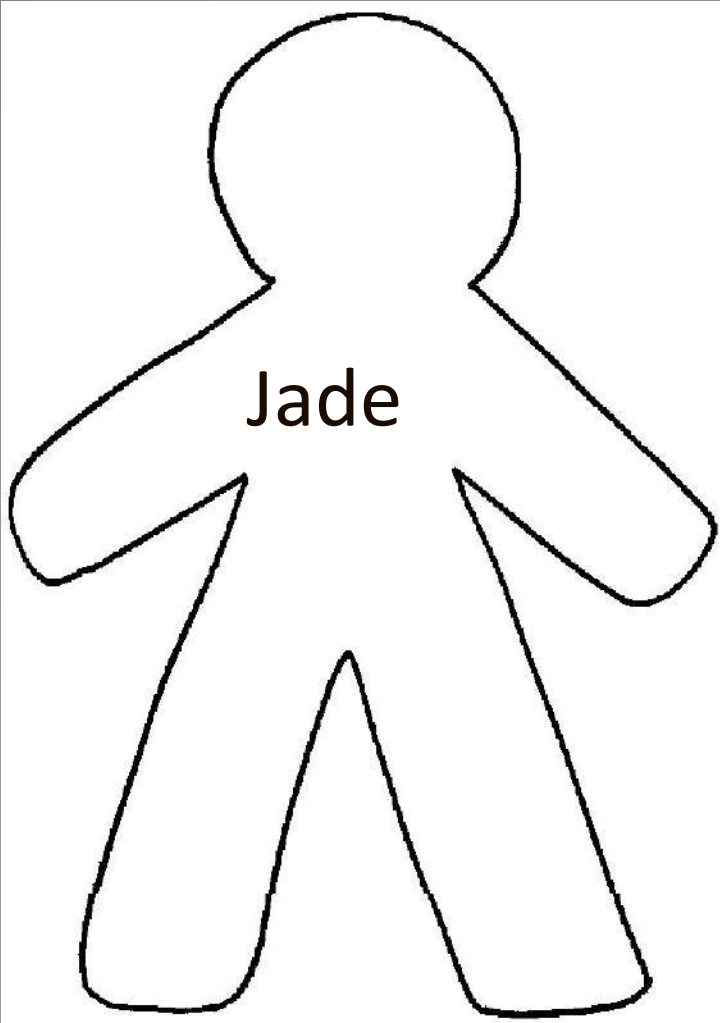


Specific grief contexts

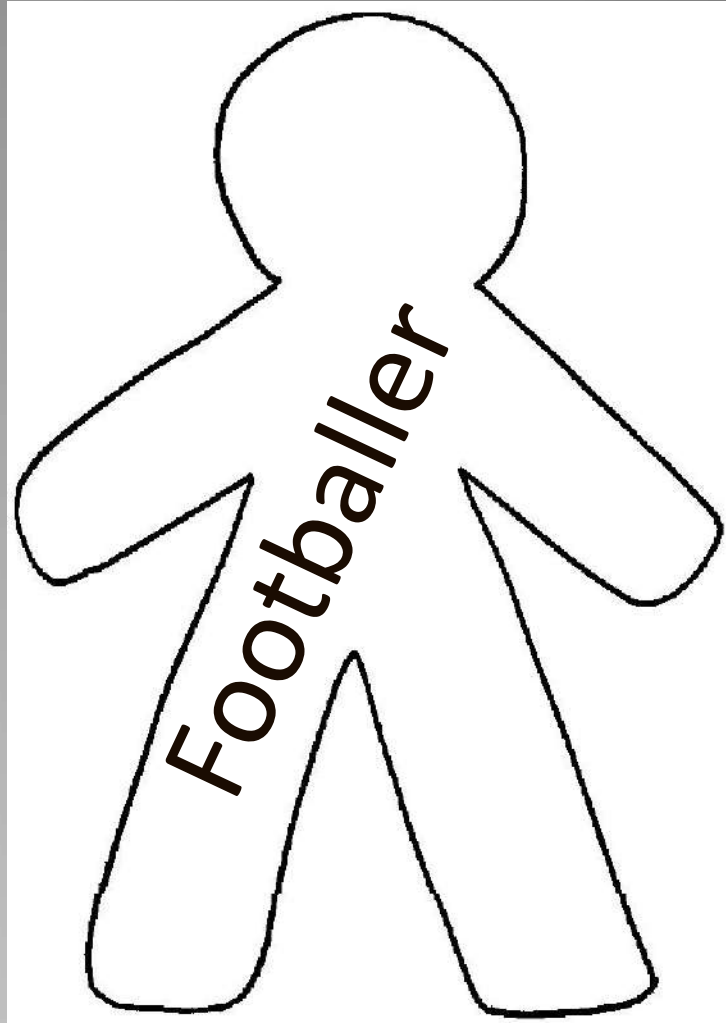
Loss of identity

Jade

- 20 year old footballer, club contract, England U19
- Knee injury (ACL rupture)
 - surgery, out for 8 months
 - Happened again, career over
- “Been my whole life since I was 7, now it’s gone”
- “If I’m not a footballer, I’m nothing”
- “Miss everything about it”:
 - friendship, structure, support purpose, excitement, competence, status, career path,
- Mood low, lacking motivation



=



purpose

context for
competence

structure

friendship

Footballer

support

income

career path

*Anticipated
future*

status

Some Values

I want to behave...

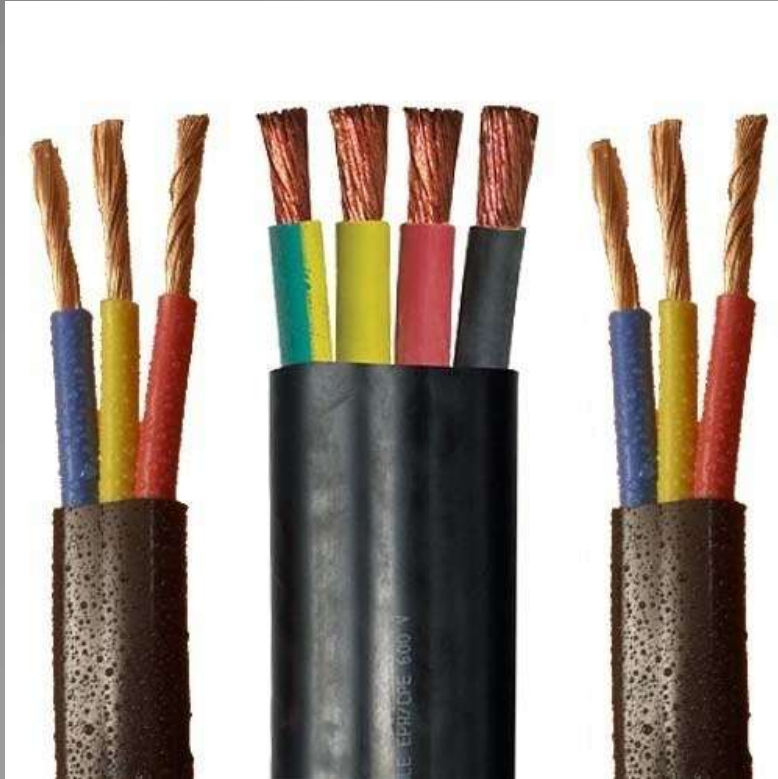
N = not so important to me

I = important to me

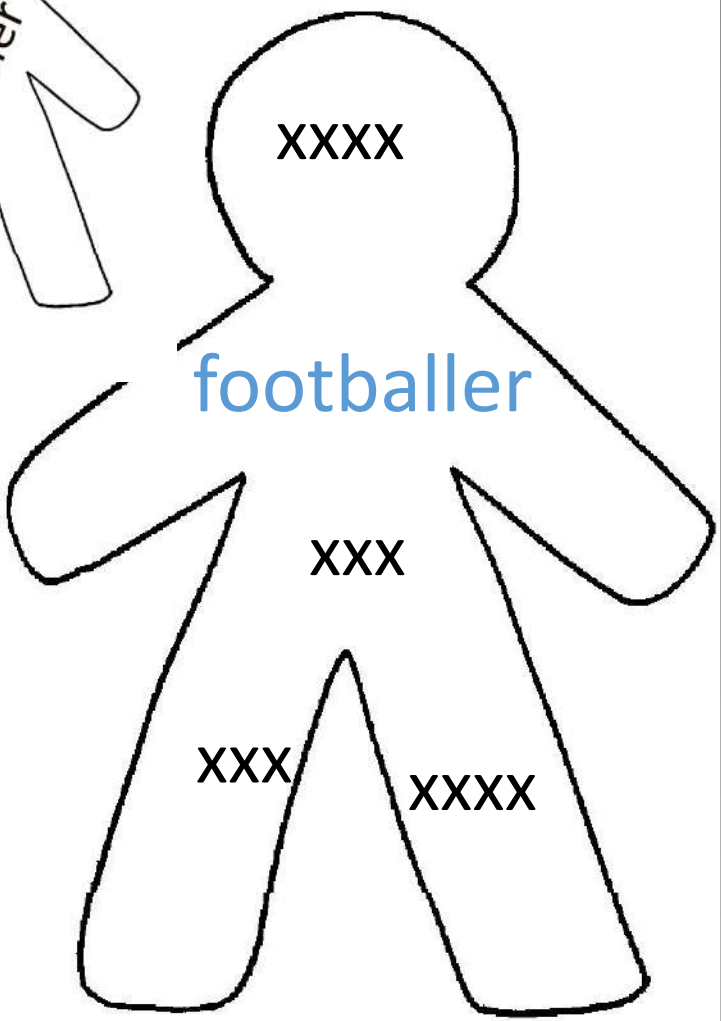
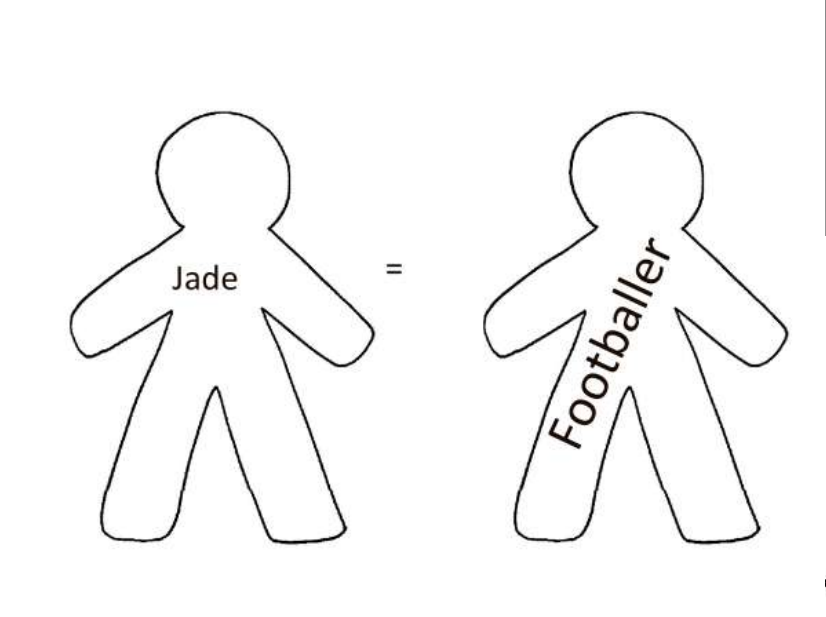
V = very important to me

- respectfully
- irreverently
- co-operatively
- competitively
- independently
- usefully
- generously
- loyally
- kindly / compassionately
- dependably
- helpfully
- sociably
- consistently
- honestly
- caringly
- adventurously
- in a nature-friendly way
- creatively
- with curiosity
- justly / fairly
- with appreciation of beauty
- openly
- spiritually / religiously
- with commitment
- gratefully
- self-challengingly
- playfully
- respectably
- flexibly
- taking other perspectives
- with originality
- with awareness
- healthily
- nurturingly
- effectively
- enthusiastically

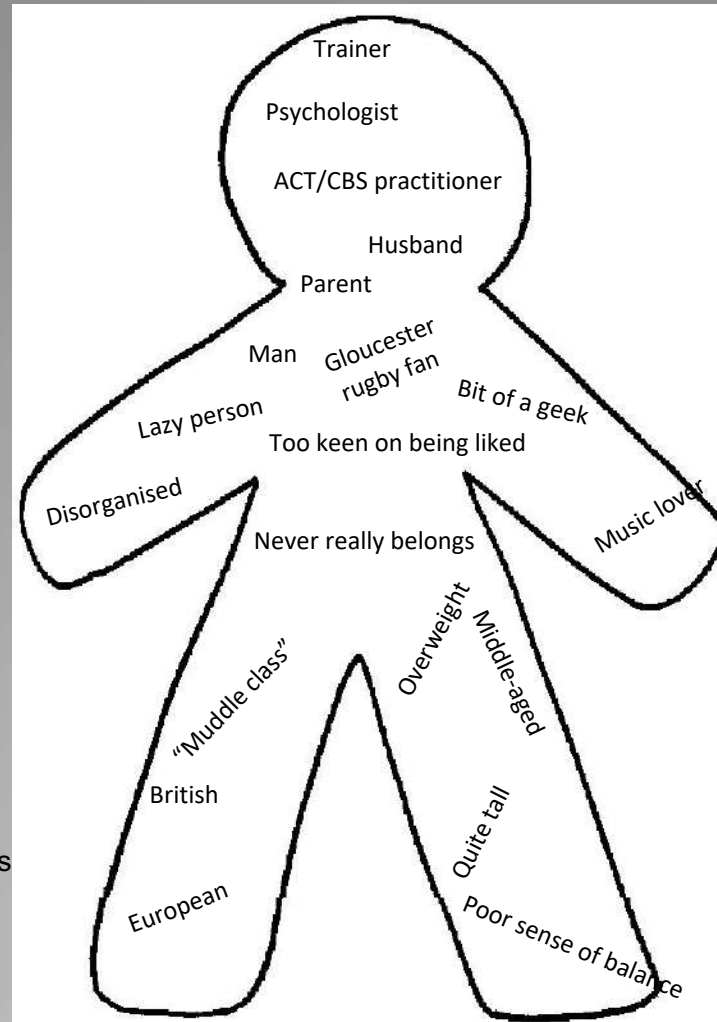
• *“some other way, that’s not on this list?”*



UNBUNDLING

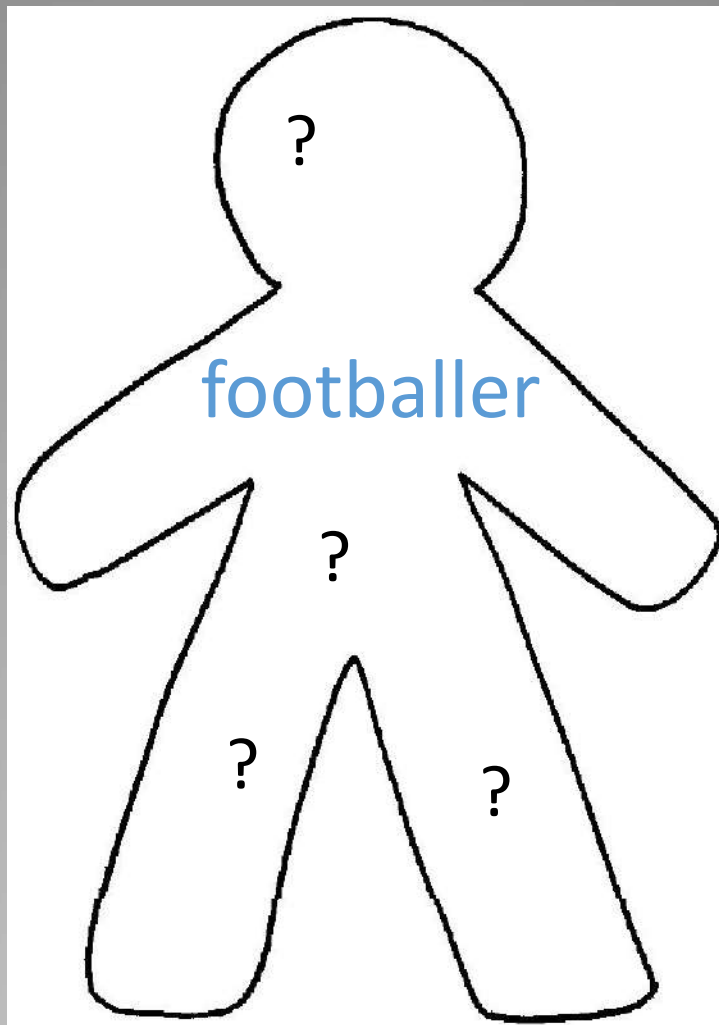


My many self-stories*

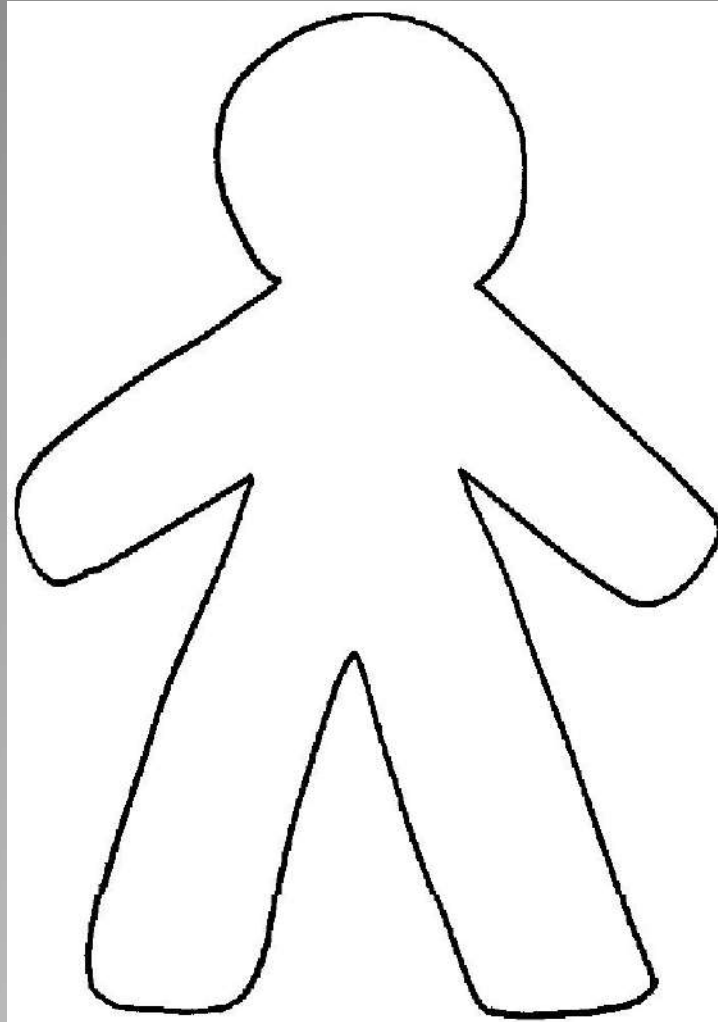


* Stories may or may not be 'true' stories

Jade



My many self-stories*



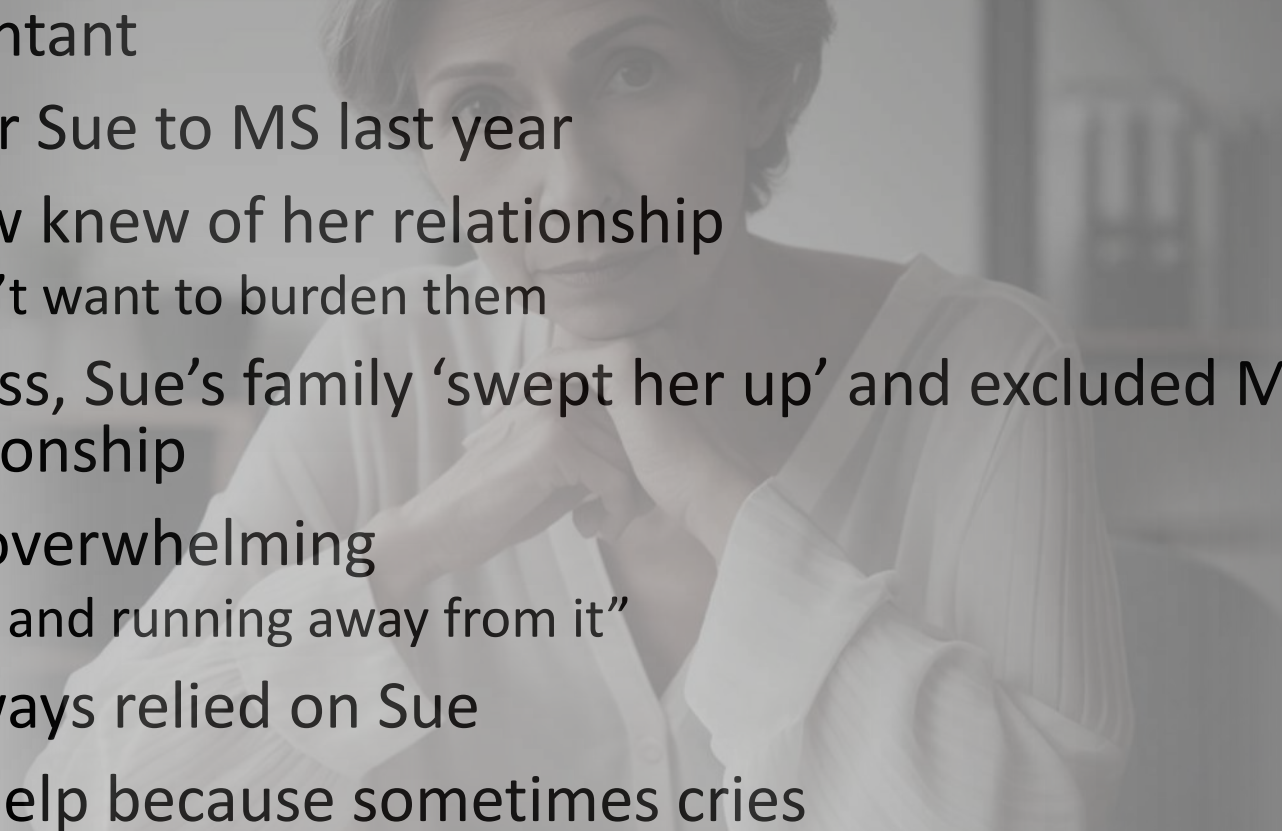
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Grief in Children

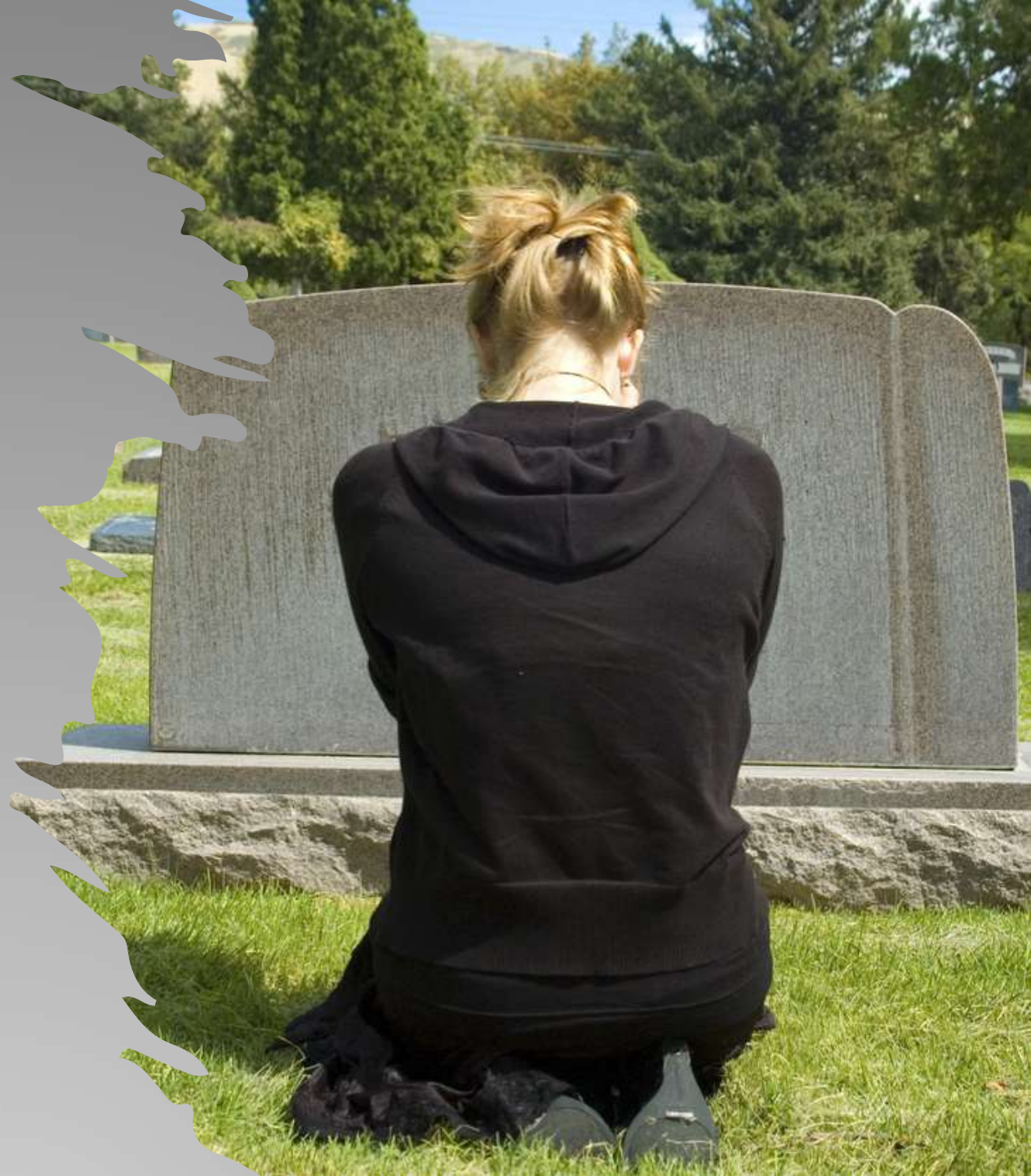


The unfairness of it all

Mira

- 62 year old, retired accountant
 - Lost her long-term partner Sue to MS last year
 - Always private person, few knew of her relationship
 - Family distant, Mira doesn't want to burden them
 - In last stages of Sue's illness, Sue's family 'swept her up' and excluded Mira – never approved of relationship
 - Finds loneliness and loss overwhelming
 - "I alternate wallowing in it and running away from it"
 - Can't plan for future – always relied on Sue
 - Back at work now, seeks help because sometimes cries
- 

“I’m glad he’s dead.
So why am I grieving?”



Multiple losses





The guilt of
moving forward

Transitional Objects / comfort objects



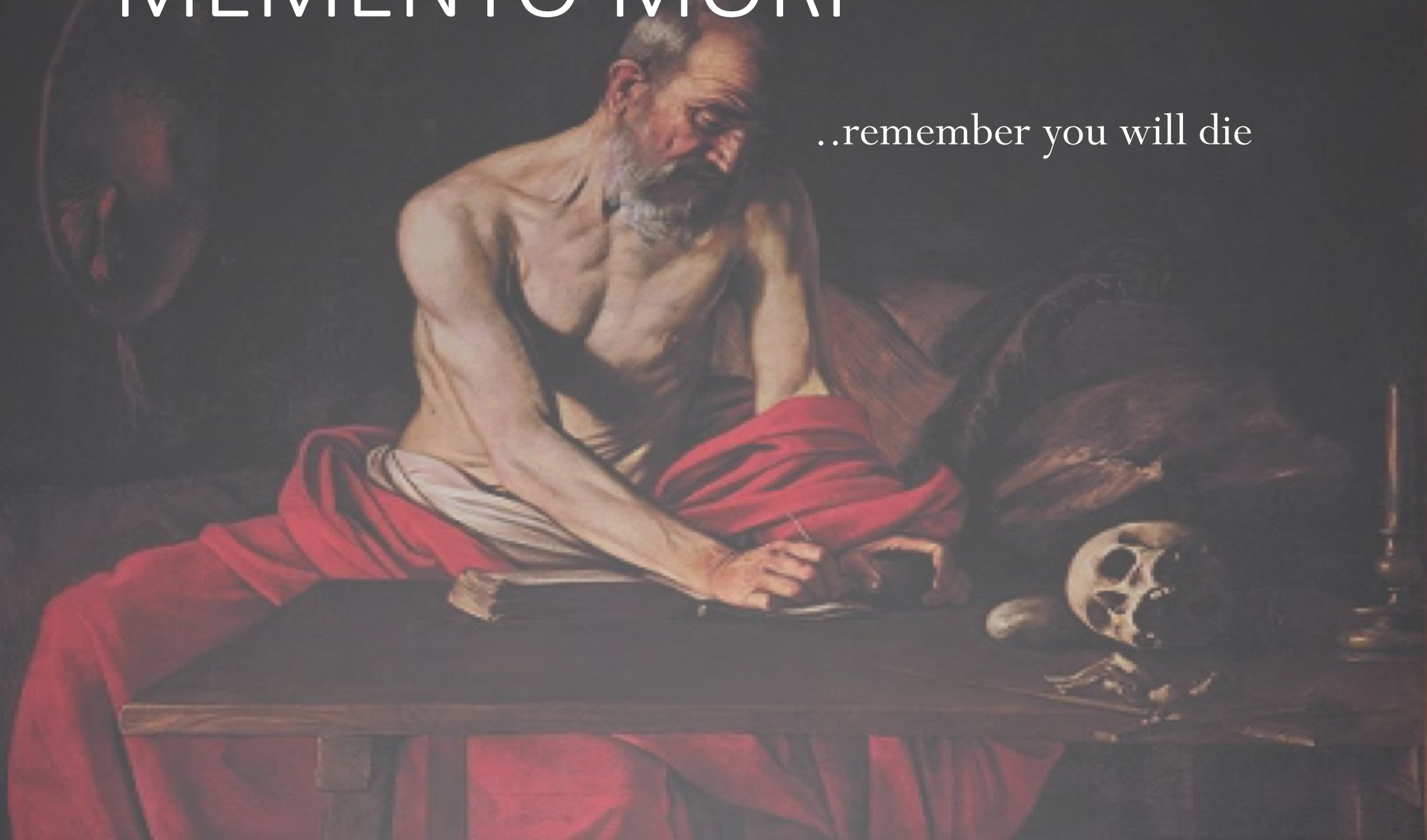


Facing future loss

Facing mortality

MEMENTO MORI

..remember you will die





Q & A





What have I learned?

