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Grief and Crisis Management: Building a Grief-Ready Workforce

Presented by

Leora Wolf-Prusan
EdD

May 26, 2026

Pre-Event Survey



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Recording for Today's Session

Please note that we are recording the didactic part of today's session. While we will not record any group discussions, the recording from today's presentation may be considered for posting on the CMHIS Learning Lab for public use and/or be made available to attendees.



CMHIS provides support for organizations and systems on how to implement the most effective mental health care in their communities.

Resource Library

We are excited to announce the launch of our Resource Library. This curated collection features practical, pragmatic, and accessible resources tied to our eight core topics to support the preparation, implementation, and sustainment of effective mental health practices and programs. We will continue to populate the Resource Library over the next few weeks, so please check back for updates.

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Factors Influencing Implementation Infographic

Published: 2025

This infographic provides an overview of factors influencing implementation, their key components, and why they matter when implementing a new effective mental health practice. The...



Implementation Strategies Infographic

Published: 2025

This infographic provides an overview of implementation strategies, their key components, and why they matter when implementing a new effective mental health practice. The infographic...



Measurement-Based Care Infographic

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This infographic provides an overview of measurement-based care, its key components, and why it matters when implementing a new effective mental health practice. The infographic...



Community Engagement and Needs Assessment Infographic

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This infographic provides an overview of community engagement and needs assessment, their key components, and why they matter when implementing a new effective mental health...



National Repository of Patient-Reported Outcome Measures

Published: 2025

The National Repository of Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (NPROM) was identified and vetted by a national panel of experts on Measurement-Based Care (MBC). The PROMs are...



Program Evaluation Infographic

Published: 2025

This infographic provides an overview of program evaluation, its key components, and why it matters when implementing a new effective mental health practice. The infographic...

Preparing

Implementing

Sustaining

The work of CMHIS and the Hubs



Events & Activities

Targeted/intensive events focused on real-world practice change.



Consultation & Coaching

Hands-on, tailored problem-solving to help your team navigate roadblocks.



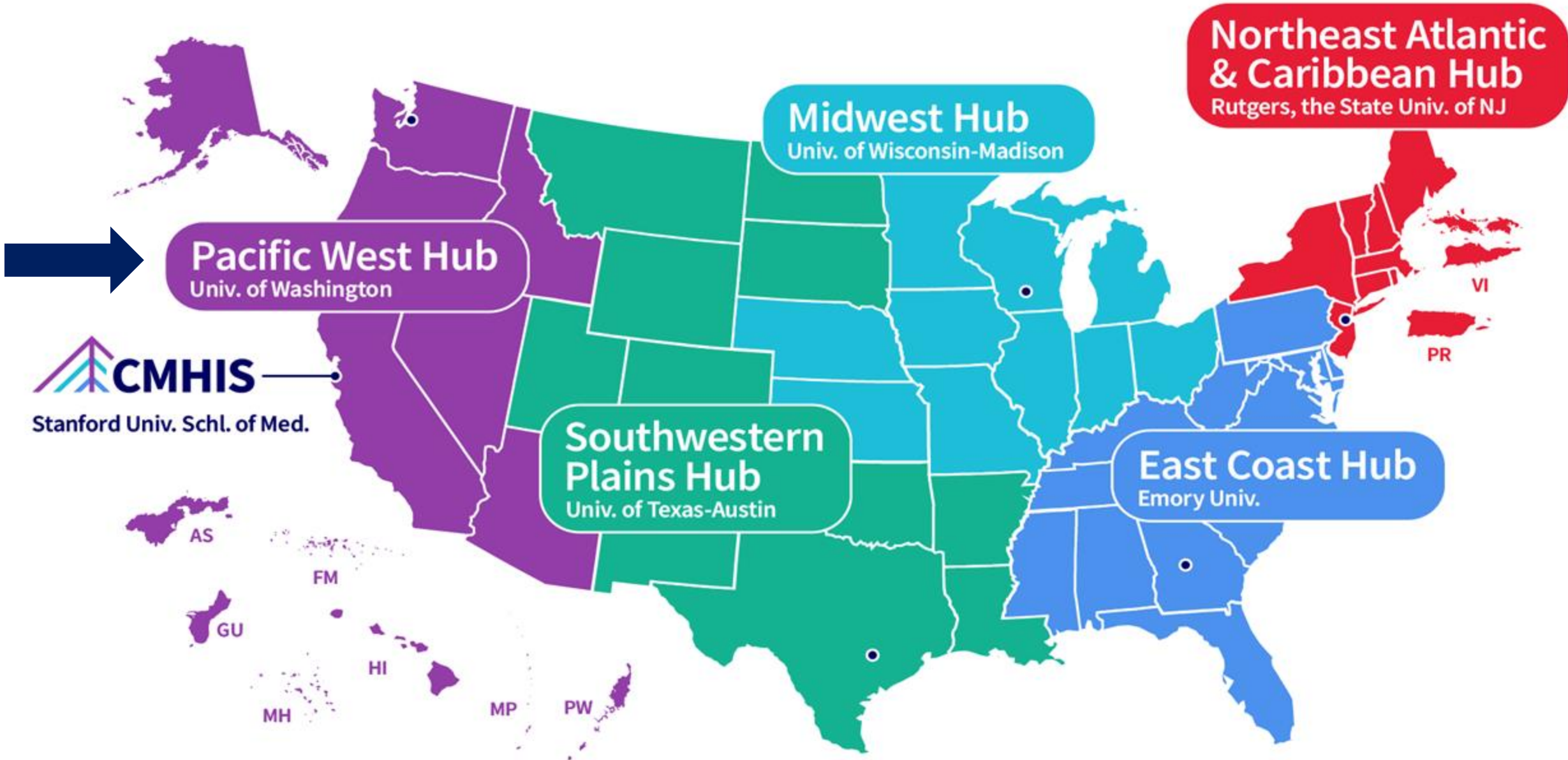
Resources

Practical tools and guides to get started, improve quality, and sustain services.



Online Learning

Experts at your fingertips through online courses and recorded sessions in our CMHIS Learning Lab.





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- Serves HHS regions 9 & 10
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Implementing MH program or practice

Community-based settings

Join at any stage in process

Register for FREE upcoming events on our website!



Peer Integration for Implementation Readiness Learning Collaborative

Thursdays June 11, 18, & 25
2:00-3:00 pm Pacific (3 Free CEs Available!)



Grief and Crisis Management Learning Collaborative

Thursdays, July 16, 23, & 30
2:00-3:00 pm Pacific (3 Free CEs Available!)

Pacific West Hub
**Mental Health
Implementation Support**

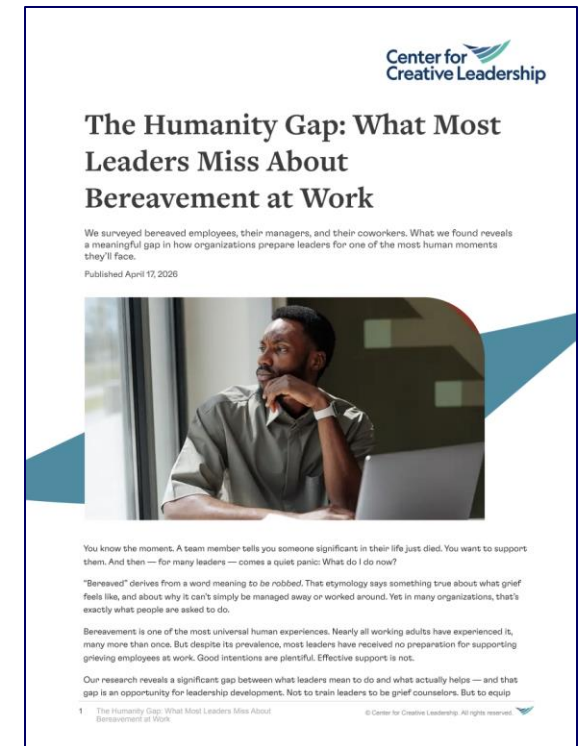
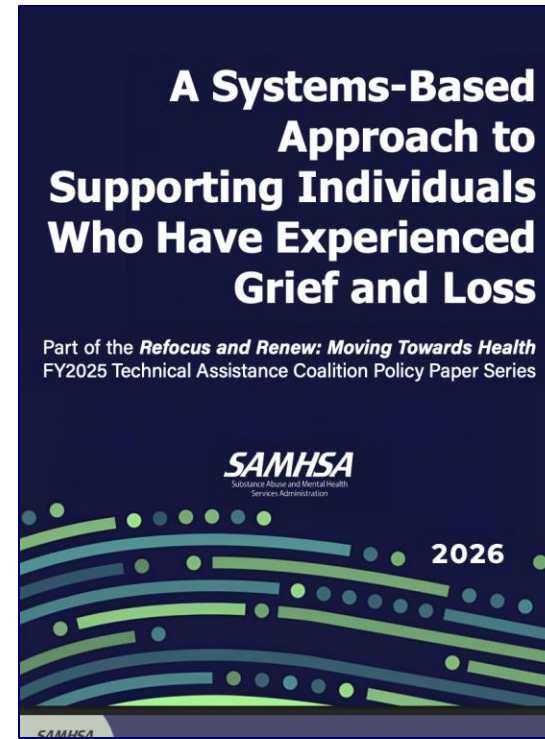
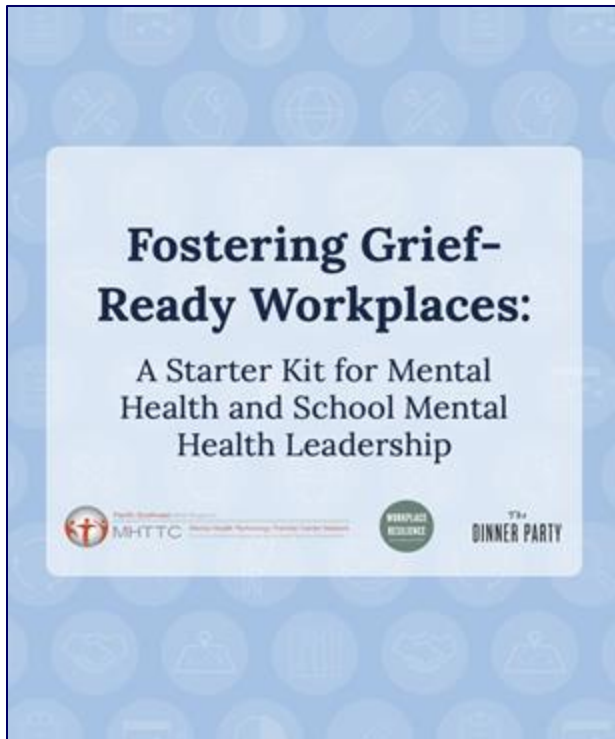
**Meet Your Presenter:
Leora Wolf-Prusan, EdD**

UW Medicine
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY
AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES



Our Reference Texts for Today and Thursday



[Fostering Grief-Ready Workplaces: A Starter Kit for Mental Health and School Mental Health Leadership \(Pacific Southwest MHTTC for SAMHSA, 2023\)](#)

[School Mental Health Crisis Leadership Lessons: Voices of Experience from Leaders in the Pacific Southwest Region \(Pacific Southwest MHTTC, 2020\)](#)

[A Systems-Based Approach to Supporting Individuals Who Have Experienced Grief and Loss](#) was prepared for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) under Task 2.2 of NASMHPD's Technical Assistance Coalition

[The Humanity Gap: What Most Leaders Miss About Bereavement at Work \(The Center for Creative Leadership, April 2026\)](#)



Grief Readiness:
The Basics



Fostering Grief-Ready Workplaces:

A Starter Kit for Mental Health and School Mental Health Leadership



Pacific Southwest (PHS) Region II
MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)



The
DINNER PARTY

Page 13

What are the losses your team is grieving?

Take a minute to free write what
comes up for you.

Loss can
come in
many
forms

death

relationships

plans

financial security

identity

sense of normalcy

social connection

peace and quiet

routine

place

health

teammates

“The expectation that we can be immersed in the suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet.

This sort of denial is no small matter.

The way we deal with loss shapes our capacity to be present to life more than anything else. The way we protect ourselves from loss may be the way in which we distance ourselves from life.

We burn out not because we don't care but because we don't grieve. We burn out because we've allowed our hearts to become so filled with loss that we have no room left to care.”

Loss impacts us across our human experience

PHYSICALLY - *stress responses, impacts of coping mechanisms*

EMOTIONALLY - *every emotion you can imagine, from anger to relief*

MENTALLY- *focus, decision-making, prioritizing*

SOCIALLY - *connection and trust*

SPIRITUALLY - *our sense of meaning, purpose, and connection*

And...

2M

Americans under the age of 30 lost a parent or sibling in the last two years.

3RD

leading cause of death by young people is suicide.

1^{IN}7

will lose a parent or sibling before they are 20.

1^{IN}5

recognized pregnancies result in miscarriage.

50%

of marriages end in divorce.

3/4 of full-time U.S. workers reported experiencing at least one symptom of a mental health condition in the past year, and over a third of symptoms cumulatively lasted five months to an entire year.

1/2 of study respondents reported having left jobs due, at least in part, to mental health reasons, compared to a third (34%) in 2019.

This number grows to **81%** for Gen Z (previously 75% in 2019) and **68%** for millennial respondents (previously 50% in 2019).

84% reported at least one workplace factor had negatively impacted their mental health in the past year—the most common being emotionally draining work (37%) and challenges with work-life balance (32%).

Grief & loss
can come in
many forms

anticipatory

collective

traumatic

cumulative

ambiguous

disenfranchised

delayed

Some shared language

- **anticipatory grief** — related to an impending loss (e.g., considering a diagnosis, anticipating that the person will die or that they or you will not be the same)
- **collective** — a shared experience (e.g., coworkers losing someone they worked with; a school shooting can have an impact on teachers/youth/parents all over the country; genocide)
- **traumatic** — the loss may be sudden or due to a traumatic event, the death may be learned of in a traumatic way
- **cumulative** — may be several deaths in a short period, a series of related deaths over a long period of time, or intergenerational
- **ambiguous** — someone is physically present but psychologically or otherwise lost, or vice versa (e.g., missing persons, dementia)
- **disenfranchised** — the griever does not have the opportunity, time, resources, etc., to move through grief
- **delayed** — feelings of grief (re)surface later than “expected”

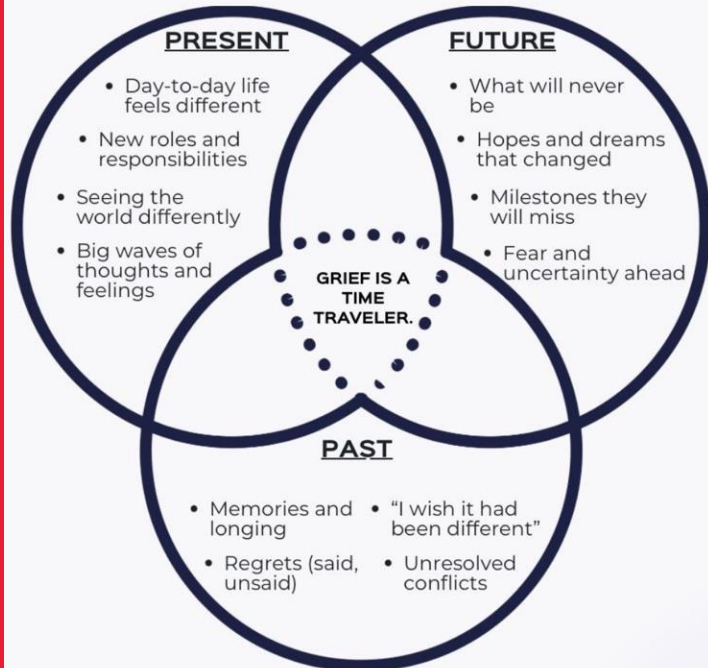
Trauma, Grief, Crisis...



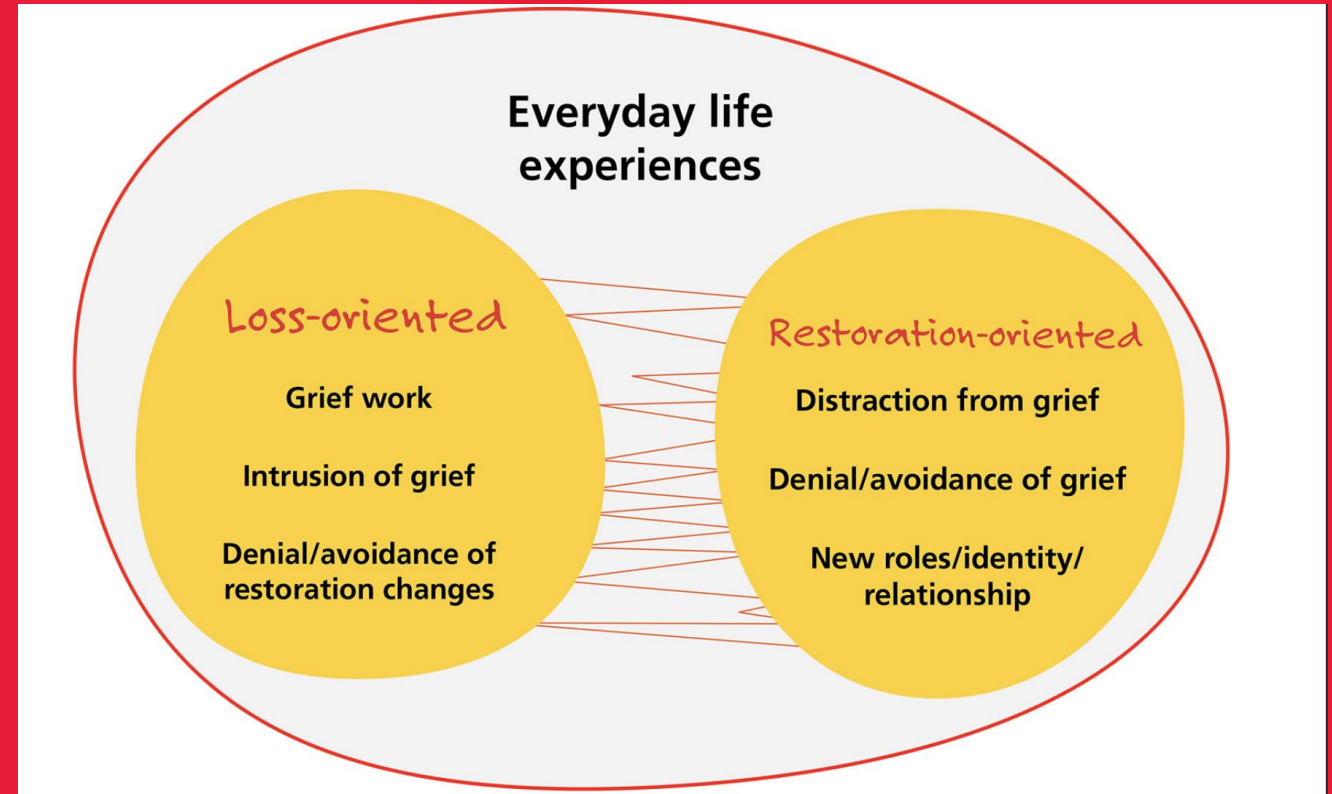
- Crises often create trauma and/or grief
 - Trauma can be an event, experience, or effect
 - Trauma = characterized by something that overwhelms a person, community, or system's ability to cope
- Grief does not always involve trauma, but trauma usually involves some degree of grief
- Grief follows loss; grief is the emotional reaction to the experience of loss
- Grief is usually not considered a mental health condition that requires clinical intervention, but trauma often provokes a requirement for treatment

THE ONLY GRIEF TIMELINE THAT MATTERS

Grief doesn't follow a timeline. It can reach into the past, hit in the present, and show up in the future.



what's your grief?



Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut (1999)

The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and Description, Death Studies 23:3 197-224

“It should not be assumed that every time loss and trauma co-occur, the predominant reactions relate to trauma, nor that consideration of bereavement is less critical or time-sensitive than trauma.

Interventions designed for the treatment of trauma may not be optimal for grief -- when addressing trauma, you are focusing on helping the person cope with reactions to something that happened; support for grief focuses on helping people cope with the persistent absence of the person rather than the way the person died.

The only treatment for grief is to grieve.”

-Dr. David Schonfeld, National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement

The slide features a dark blue background with a decorative border at the top and bottom. The border consists of a repeating zigzag pattern of lines in shades of purple, blue, and teal. In the center, a white rectangular box contains the text.

So... why grief readiness at work? For organizations?

Fostering Grief-Ready Workplaces:

A Starter Kit for Mental Health and School Mental Health Leadership



Pacific Southwest (PHS Region 9)
MHTTC
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



The
DINNER PARTY

Turn to page 7

So, now that we've grounded ourselves in grief...

What might "Grief Readiness" mean in your work context?

Take a minute to free write what comes up for you and share in the chat.

Grief readiness in the workplace:

Proactively preparing for the impacts of grief experiences on employee wellbeing and workflow.



Grief readiness in the workplace is about preparing to meet the needs of grieving employees by developing policies and cultural norms that help them thrive at work.

Going back to work after a loss can be ...

Full of empty platitudes

Supportive

Isolating

Confidence building

Overwhelming

*AND OR
BOTH*

A welcomed distraction

Managers ill-equipped

A community

Present but not present

A time to build loyalty

Discouraging

An anchor

Grief is universal.

**Access to validation, connection,
understanding, safety, and dignity is
not.**

Grief-Ready Management

“We live in a culture that only wants to talk about what’s going well. Anything that’s not going well is positioned as a detour from the main road. The truth is that pain is not a detour from the main road. Pain is part of the road we walk as human beings.”

SUSAN CAIN

*Bittersweet: How Sorrow and
Longing Make Us Whole*

Unlocking Us
with **BRENÉ BROWN**



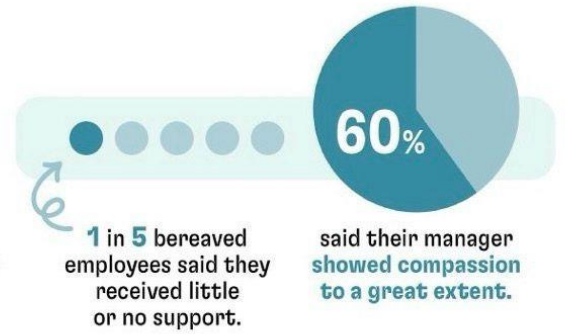
Loss is a time when your organizational culture is truly exposed for what it is.

-Healthcare CEO

Grief at Work:

What Employees Remember About Their Leaders

Our research surveyed bereaved employees, their managers, and coworkers — **and the results are telling.**



Acknowledging the Loss

What Helped

"My manager sent a thoughtful card to my home, which made me feel more connected while working remotely."

What Hurt

"My manager knew about my loss but did not acknowledge (it) ... I am still angry that he never acknowledged it."

Workload & Expectations

What Helped

"My manager told me to take it easy and only complete the tasks I felt I could complete."

What Hurt

"There was an expectation for me to recover quicker. When my focus didn't return, he lost patience with me."

Flexibility

What Helped

"She let me know she'd work with me however I needed ... schedule changes, reduced workload and coverage if I needed to leave or had family obligations."

What Hurt

"They did not make any accommodations when I came back. Life just went on as if nothing had happened."

How a leader responds to bereavement leaves a lasting impression.

Checking In

What Helped

"She would surprise me with coffee or just pop in to see how I was doing."

What Hurt

"After a few days they weren't checking in on me anymore. It's like they wanted everything to go back to how it was."

Going to Bat

What Helped

"My manager talked to higher ups to allow me to take as much unpaid time off as needed."

What Hurt

"My manager did nothing to help me get more time off ... I fought that battle all on my own."

Interpersonal Sensitivity

What Helped

"She knew to back off when major holidays or anniversaries were coming up because it would impact me."

What Hurt

"She told me I should 'just get over it' ... that I needed to 'buck up.'"

4 Stages to Grief-Ready Management & Organizational Culture



Trauma-informed grief management



Assumptions

(They probably know what to do)



Agreements

(Yep, we've had a conversation; they've been trained and are clear.)

Ten Principles to Guide Conversation with Grieving Employees

Listen and ask open & honest questions

Erase the pity face and instill confidence

Make a plan and follow up

Ask yourself, how would an employee's experience differ if they were different in their circumstance?

Be conscious of time and place

Stay away from cliché sayings & attitudes

Offer specific support

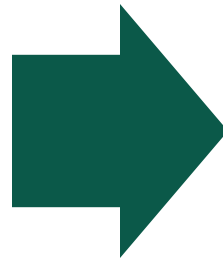
Identify their options, but reaffirm their agency

Knowing less is more

Avoid advice giving or assuming you know what's best for them

FROM:

- *“How did they die?”*
- *“You poor thing, you look terrible. How are you even working today?”*
- *“Are you sure you want to be back at work? If I were you, I wouldn’t be able to function.”*



TO:

- *“How can I, as a manager, be most supportive to you right now?”*
- *“This must be really hard. How do you want me to let the team know?”*
- *“At the moment, what’s the best way for us to check in about all of this?”*

4 Stages to Grief-Readiness



Get ready

Put clear protocols, training, and cultural norms in place to minimize people being unprepared for a loss.

Name one policy or structure (formal or informal) that your organization already has in place to support grieving employees. How are grieving employees identified?

Whose role is it to carry it out? Does it happen consistently?

Welcome Back

Both humanize and standardize the way you welcome an employee back from a loss experience.

Is there a consistent way that death losses are honored in your staff?

If so, what is it? If not, how has it differed across different circumstances?

Engage & Equip

Equip teams with grief sensitivity and minimize the absenteeism that comes with times of loss.

How is the workload shifted, if at all, for someone who's experienced a death loss?

How is that communicated to colleagues who may be taking on an additional load?

Keep it up

Create a culture of ongoing support, not just in times of crisis.

Are there any systems in place to check in on employees following a known death loss?

	Ready	Getting Ready	Not Yet Ready
Me	I feel clear, steady and knowledgeable about how to support myself and my team in experiences of deep grief.	I'm still learning about my own grief bias, the needs of my team, and how to be a grief ready leader.	I haven't started my own personal or professional work yet on my own grief narratives.
My Team	We have clear protocols, training and cultural norms in place to make sure our organizations aren't caught off by a loss.	We have had trainings and professional development on grief, loss and trauma to foster psychological safety, but haven't yet moved from awareness to action.	We have not yet begun this work (but I'm here!)
My Org / System	We have a strong bereavement policy, a culture of peer support, managers are well trained in sensitivity, and loss experiences often bring us closer together vs than strain the trust of our teams. We have a culture of ongoing support, not just in times of crisis. We humanize and standardize the way we welcome an employee back.	My organization is getting ready. We have policies and training in place, and we can support employees who are grieving, but there's still room for improvement. Our organization's policies and practices are more equal than equitable.	My organization is not ready. There is a lack of conversation, policies, programs, and overall safety around grief and loss in my work culture

How do we know if we are grief-ready? (Starter Kit, p.14)

Developing your plan

Starter Kit pages 34-36



WHAT: What is the area of Grief Readiness I want to work on? What is my idea for how to make my organization more grief-ready?

WHY: What is my objective? Why am I trying to implement this plan?

WHO: Who is this plan going to impact? Who needs to be involved?

WHEN: When can I begin? What are the milestones?

HOW: What resources do I need to access? What partners do I need to recruit? What are the blocks in my way?

I'LL KNOW I'M SUCCESSFUL WHEN: What goals do you have? How will you know you've been successful?

In simpler terms...



- **In what way is your organization not fully grief-ready?** (i.e., In our organization, we're not fully Grief Ready because ...)
- **What would be the ideal state to solve for this?** (i.e., Wouldn't it be amazing if ... ?)
- **To get started on this idea, what is actionable in the next 6 months?** (i.e., I can start working on this by ...)

Closing

Your idea or
plan:

The takeaway

My commitment to myself is:

My commitment to my team is:

What is my “most elegant next step”?

Core Principles of Grief Readiness

- **It's not if, but when. And, it's probably right now. And it may be invisible.**
- **Standardize support without losing humanity.**
- **Knowing less can be more.**
- **Shift from prescribing to listening.**
- **Recognize how systems and beliefs are impacting their experience.**
- **Even if you don't have letters behind your name, you can do this.**
- **Knowing less is more. This is NOT about extracting personal information or becoming their therapist.**
- **How do we show the same amount of support/forethought to people experiencing loss as we do to new parents?**

We can't fix, solve, or save people from grief.

What we can (and must) do is ensure our workplaces lessen the isolation and disconnection that comes with grief and loss.

Resources & Extended Learning



[The Humanity Gap: What Most Leaders Miss About Bereavement at Work](#) (The Center for Creative Leadership, April 2026)

[The Workplace Is Full of Grief We Refuse to Name](#) (McCastle, 2026)

[APA Presidential Task Force for Culturally Informed Trauma and Grief Recovery Toolkit](#) (American Psychological Association, 2024)

[Grief Literacy: The Leadership Skill Most Organizations Haven't Learned Yet](#) (Kilby, 2026)

[State of Grief Report: Building a Sustainable Culture of Grief Support](#) (New York Life Foundation, 2025)

[A Guide to The Human Side of Workplace Transitions](#) (Weaver, 2026)

[Suffocated Grief & Supporting Black Youth - Dr. Tashel Bordere](#); Bordere, T. (2019). Suffocated grief, resilience, and survival among African American families. In M. H. Jacobsen & A. Petersen's (Eds.), *Exploring grief: Towards a sociology of sorrow*. New York: Routledge.

Life After Loss

Virtual Summit Exploring Grief Aftermath

RECORDINGS & RESOURCES
NOW AVAILABLE

ABOUT THE SERIES

Grieving is not a process to rush through – it's a lived experience that deserves informed support. Explore what life after loss really looks like.



Grief is not Linear

Explore trauma-informed frameworks that honor each person's unique journey through loss – across cultures and communities.



Community is Medicine

Learn how peer support, collective healing, and culturally-responsive care reduce isolation and build resilience.



Practical Tools for Providers

Evidence-based strategies you can bring directly to your work with clients, families, and teams.



ACCESS:

- On-Demand Recordings
- Downloadable Grief Aftermath Resources
- Faculty bios
- And More



SCAN QR CODE TO ACCESS

cars-rp.org/life-after-loss

See You Thursday!



Coaching session: Thursday, May 28th ~ 2-3:00 pm Pacific

You are already registered!

Don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions:

pacificwest@cmhisupport.org

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