



A JEWISH GUIDE
FOR PROFESSIONALS

To Supporting
Individuals Through
Traumatic Death

WELCOME

This guide is a resource designed for use by professionals in communities where a traumatic death has taken place.

Intention

- **BE PRESENT:** One of the most important ways to offer support to those impacted by the loss is to simply be present. For professionals, this may take a number of forms, including sending a note or making a call upon hearing of the death in order to offer concrete support services, or attending the funeral, or making a shiva call to visit the home of the mourners. Using the customs of visiting a house of mourning, we can see how our first job in the wake of a traumatic death is to offer our focused presence
- It is custom in Jewish tradition not to greet the mourners directly in a shiva house. The one/s attempting to offer comfort by making a visit to the mourners may take a seat near the mourner and wait for the mourner to begin speaking. All we are expected to do is to be present for the mourner/s.
- **YOU ARE NOT ALONE:** Upon leaving a house of mourning, Jewish wisdom teaches that the one visiting the mourners says the following words, traditional among families from Ashkenazi backgrounds: HaMakom yinachem etchem b'toch sha'ar avlei tzion v'Yerushalayim... may God comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem - among the other mourners - signaling to the mourner that they are not alone in their experience of grief. (Sephardic custom offers: min hashamayim tenachumu - from the heavens, may you (plural) be comforted.)

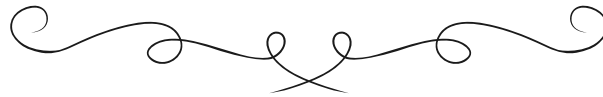
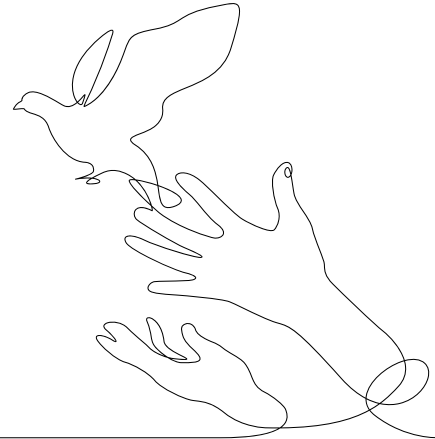
WHY THIS RESOURCE?

- Traumatic deaths out of time can and often feel different than deaths that occur after the course of a long illness or at an advanced age. Examples of traumatic deaths: sudden death, such as suicide, natural disaster, violence, accidents, fast moving disease, especially at young age, etc. These deaths may be understood as death "out of time."
- The goal of this resource is to provide supportive and accessible Jewish wisdom for how to approach a variety of situations involving traumatic death in your communities. Through education, we can help break down the shame and stigma that too often accompany experiences of traumatic death.
- Upon learning of a traumatic death of someone in your community, it is natural to be curious about the cause of death. This curiosity may stem from many different things such as an unconscious desire to reassure ourselves that we are not going to die in the way the traumatic death happened, past trauma, and many other factors. It is okay to be curious and to need support.

Mi Sheberach for Grief

A mi sheberach is a Jewish prayer traditionally said for someone who is in need of healing, whether it is spiritual, physical, or emotional. We want to offer this mi sheberach for grief to those who have lost someone or are supporting someone else who has lost someone to traumatic death. It was written by an individual in their own voice and based on their own experience. This prayer may not directly reflect your personal experience with mental health or the particular topic on which this prayer focuses.

You might want to write your own mi sheberach to reflect your experience.



To the One who blessed our ancestors, and the one who blesses all beings here on this earth, bless all those who are suffering the grief of someone they loved. May they find solace in their memory, and may their love find a resting place in their hearts.

Bless all those who are struggling with the death of someone with whom they had a difficult relationship. May they find compassion for themselves and renewal of spirit.

May they have patience and strength, as grief can come in waves throughout their lives. May they find the courage to share their grief with others, no matter how many years have gone by.

While they can be shattered by loss, they can be healed by the love from others. Sacred one, help them find ways to open their hearts to love and hope.

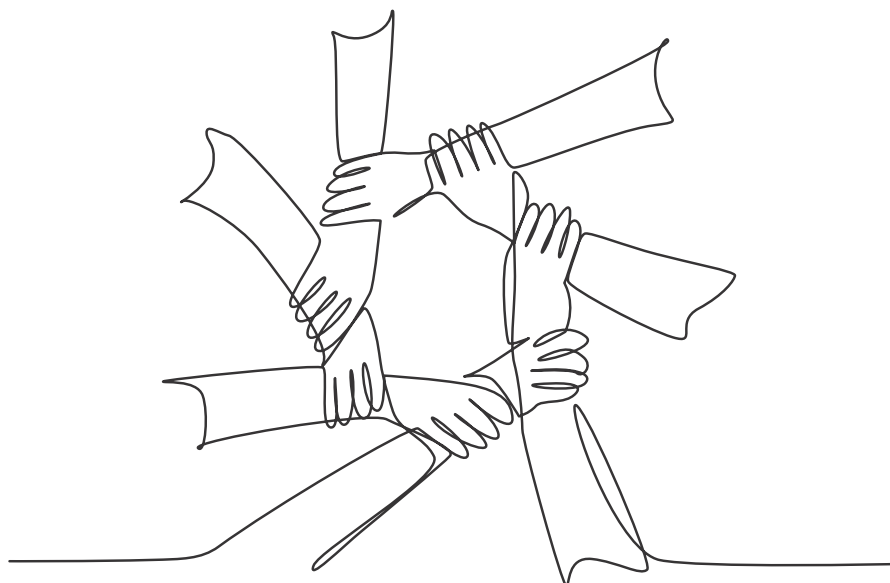
Bless all those who are grieving, for it is an honor to have lived.

Make both life and death a blessing. Amen.

- Nancy L. Kriseman, LSCW, Jan 2021

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DEDICATION

This resource and its companion piece are dedicated in honor of those who have died from traumatic deaths and in honor of those who are grieving someone who has died from a traumatic death.

All those who support the mourners in our communities - dedicated to the helpers



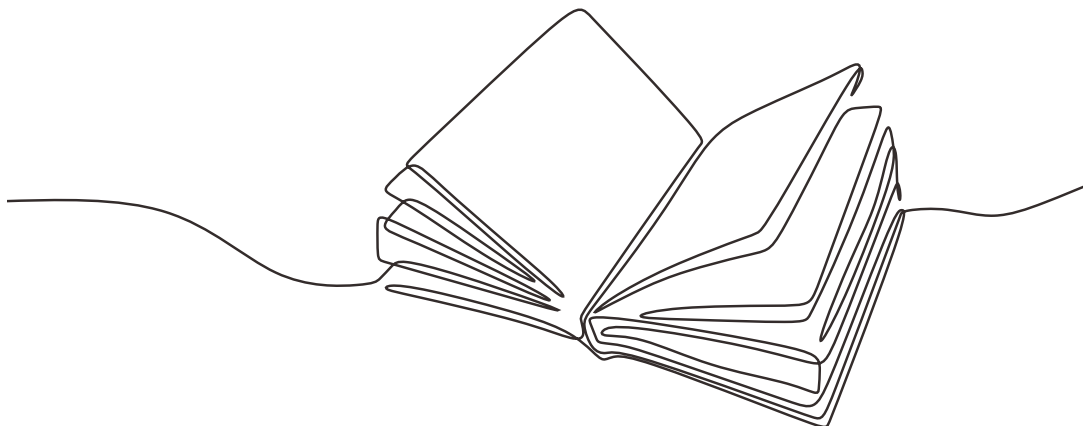
ABOUT THE RESOURCE/TOOLKIT

Intended audience: This resource is designed for use by professionals and lay leaders in Jewish community settings who are often called upon as “first responders” after a traumatic death in their community.

How to use it: Reading the guide before it is needed can help professionals understand the ways in which Jewish wisdom can help address crises that emerge as the result of a traumatic death. This resource is meant to act as a guide that helps individuals understand trauma, how it impacts grief, and see the ways in which Jewish wisdom can provide support while grieving a traumatic death. It will also offer a space to think about how Jewish professionals can support themselves in light of a traumatic death. This guide won't have all of the answers, rather, we hope it inspires you to think of ways to intentionally support yourself and the immediate griever/s. The resource includes information, readings, activities, and additional resources to explore.

Other pieces in the collection: This resource for professionals has a companion piece designed for individuals. The Individual's guide is intended for individuals who are supporting people in their lives grieving a traumatic death.

Disclaimer: This resource does not replace professional medical or mental health support. Nothing in this resource is to be construed as medical advice or treatment. For all medical questions, please consult a medical professional or treatment facility.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to a grant from UpStart, the Blue Dove Foundation and The Shomer Collective were able to join together to create these impactful resource guides, workshops, and articles focusing on how to support individuals and communities through traumatic death.

Contributors

The Shomer Collective

- Rabbi Melanie Levav, BCC, LMSW, Executive Director
- Samantha Zellman, Director of Programs & Partnerships

The Blue Dove Foundation

- Gabby Spatt, former CEO
- Carly Coons, LSW, Director of Education & Programming

Thank you to BeWell, an initiative of Jewish Federations of North America, for reviewing the resource and promoting it through the Resiliency Roundtable.

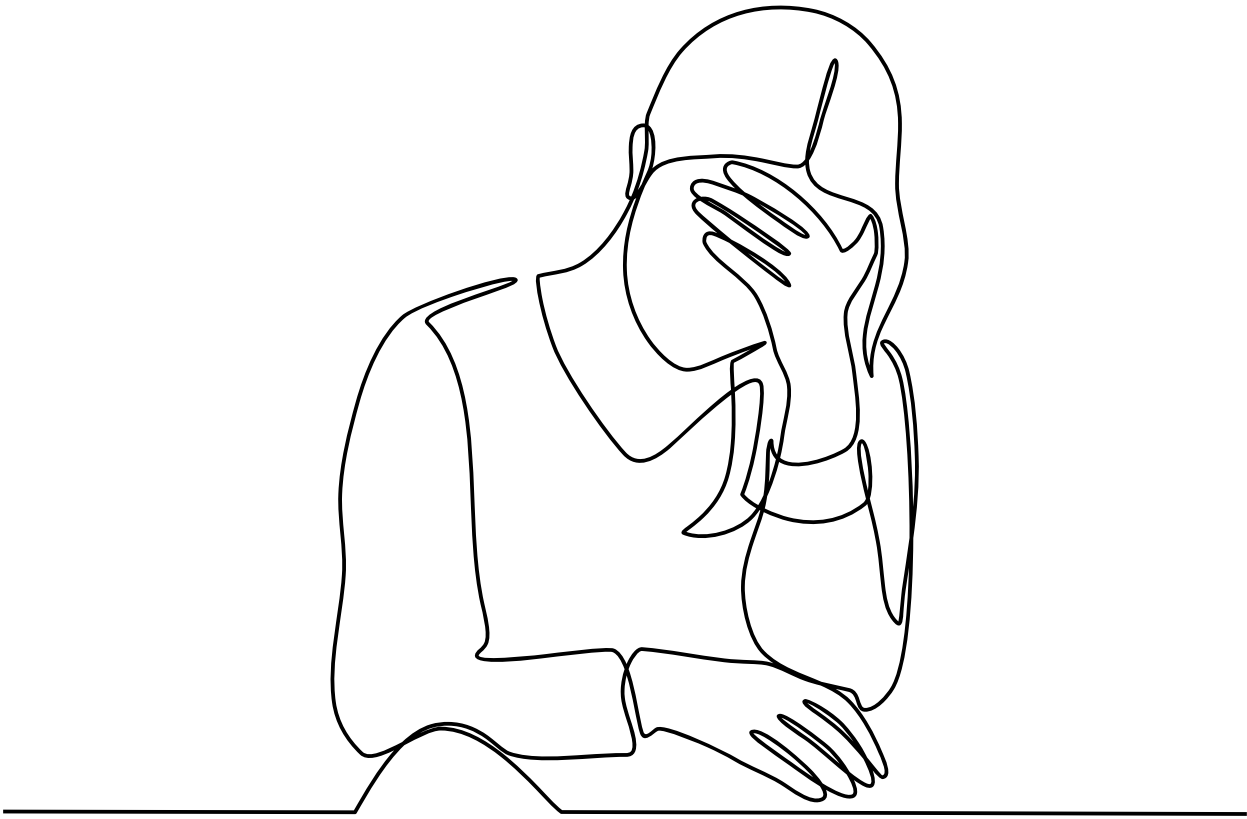
Thank you as well to our peers in the mental health and Jewish communal professional fields for reviewing the resource and supporting its creation.

A very special thank you to Dr. Betsy Stone for reviewing the content of the resource to strengthen the application of Jewish wisdom in addressing mental health.

About the Creators

Shomer Collective: The mission of The Shomer Collective is to improve end-of-life experiences for individuals and their families—inspired by Jewish wisdom, values, and practices—by curating content and resources and building a diverse network of organizational partners. We envision a world where end-of-life matters are spoken about openly, thoughtfully, and frequently, leaving an impact not only on the person who is dying but on whole family and community systems.

The Blue Dove Foundation: The mission of the Blue Dove Foundation is to transform the way the Jewish community understands and responds to mental illness and addictions. The Blue Dove Foundation envisions a healthy, vibrant Jewish community that is welcoming and knowledgeable about mental health. We work to educate the community about mental health through a Jewish lens. We produce powerful and engaging educational resources about the connections between mental wellness and Judaism.



TRAUMA

Introduction

Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh: All Jews are responsible for one another.

We are interconnected and must be invested in the mental wellness and overall well-being of others. By preparing to help and support one another, we all benefit. Trauma is a very sensitive topic and can be challenging to fully comprehend. Our goal in this section is to provide some basic information about how it affects us and how it impacts how we grieve. We hope this knowledge provides understanding and comfort as you navigate traumatic death.

What is trauma?

“Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual’s ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, and diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences.”¹ What is traumatic or distressing for one person might not be the same for someone else.²

In the simplest terms, a traumatic death out of time is one that is sudden or unexpected. As with trauma, what qualifies it as a traumatic death can be different for everyone.

Other ways to understand traumatic death out of time include, but are not limited to, the age of the person who has died; “if it involves violence; if there is damage to the loved one’s body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with the intent to harm; if the survivor regards the death as preventable; if the survivor believes that the loved one suffered; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as unfair and unjust.”³ Some of these concerns may lead to “survivor’s guilt,”⁴ in which it is not uncommon to feel guilty about surviving while others didn’t.



¹ <https://integratedlistening.com/blog/what-is-trauma/>

² <https://www.apa.org/topics/disasters-response/recovering>

³ <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-34688-001>

⁴ <https://www.joincake.com/blog/survivors-guilt/>

What is the impact of a traumatic event?⁵

Traumatic events affect people in both physical and emotional ways. These symptoms vary widely from person to person and might not occur in predictable ways. If they become severe, they can develop into post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or other mental illnesses. Symptoms may appear quickly, or they may surprise us later on.

Physical symptoms may include...

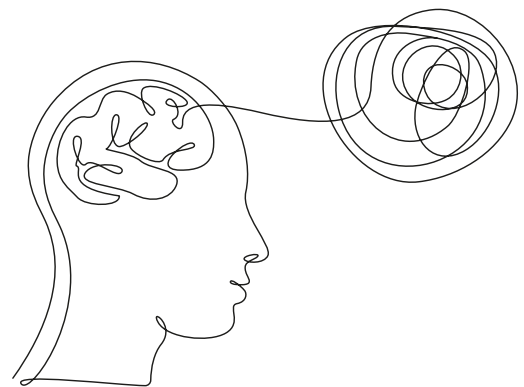
- Digestive issues
- Chronic aches and pains
- Racing heartbeat
- Difficulty concentrating
- Insomnia, nightmares, or excessive sleeping
- Disordered eating (either diminished or increased)
- An inability to relax/increased alertness to surroundings, known as hypervigilance
- Exhaustion

Emotional symptoms may include...

- Anxiety or anger
- Guilt, shame, or self-blame
- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Confusion
- Brain fog
- Irritability
- Mistrust

What is second-hand trauma, and how does it affect us?

A person does not have to experience a traumatic event directly to suffer from these symptoms. When this occurs, it is called secondary or second-hand trauma. The symptoms are just as real and significant as if someone experienced the event themselves. Even the threat of a traumatic event occurring or hearing someone share their traumatic experience can be enough to trigger the symptoms. Individuals with a history of trauma can be more sensitive to current trauma.



⁵The Blue Dove Foundation "Jewish Mental Wellness Toolkit"

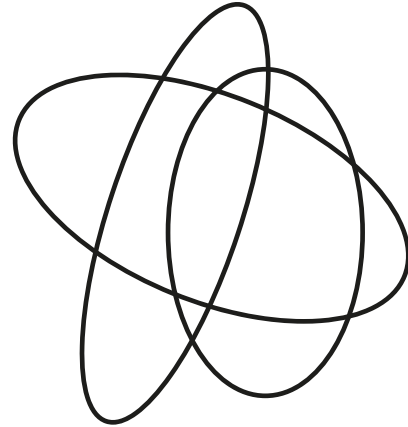
How do trauma and grief intersect?

Grief is the “anguish experienced after significant loss... such as the death of a beloved person.”⁶ It is the internal experience, while mourning is the outward expression of the thoughts and feelings an individual is experiencing.

Grief is a normal experience and may take a long time to integrate. We don’t “recover” from grief, as society often leads us to believe; rather, we integrate it into our lives understanding grief has changed us.⁷ We may continue to re-experience our grief throughout our lives with varying intensity and based on our current circumstances. It is important to acknowledge that those who have lost someone via traumatic death may struggle with blame, placing it on themselves or others around them. They might think, for example, “If only I had picked up the phone” or “They shouldn’t have been there.”

There are many models to help us understand and process grief. One of the more commonly known is the stages of grief by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D. This model was not originally developed to understand grief, nor is it the only model to do so; however, it is widely referred to in society and may be familiar to many people.

- The Kübler-Ross model breaks down the process of grieving into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. According to this model, individuals may experience these stages in various orders, more than one stage at a time, or only some of these stages. Everyone processes and moves through grief differently, and this model of the process does not define all grief experiences.⁸



⁶ <https://dictionary.apa.org/grief>

⁷ <https://whatsyourgrief.com/what-does-it-mean-to-integrate-grief/>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/3Cz4qXP>

Individuals who are grieving after a traumatic death may experience traumatic grief, which is a “severe form of separation distress that usually occurs following the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one.”⁹ Trauma affects everyone differently, so there is no set degree of trauma that might trigger traumatic grief. Traumatic grief adds an additional layer to the typical grief patterns, having to navigate whatever arises due to the impact of the trauma.

- **Traumatic grief** is unique to both traditional grief and trauma. Some of the symptoms may be the same, but the severity and expression likely will differ. Someone experiencing traumatic grief might develop conditions such as an anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress, or a mood disorder following a traumatic death in their lives.
- Individuals can also experience **post-traumatic growth**, which is a “positive psychological change...after a life crisis or traumatic event.”¹⁰ After a traumatic experience, some individuals “develop new understandings of themselves and the world they live in; of how to relate to other people; of the kind of future they might have; and...about how to live life.”¹¹

What is trauma-informed care?

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma. Trauma-Informed Care recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual’s life. It requires a system to make a paradigm shift from asking, “What is wrong with this person?” to “What has happened to this person?”¹² It is important to remember that trauma impacts everyone in different ways.

- If you are unfamiliar with this approach, it can be useful to better understand how this framework can guide your approach to supporting the griever with their trauma.
- Some things to consider:
 - What protocols does your organization already have in place to support people through trauma?
 - How can this framework guide your approach in the short term and the longer term?
 - What can you do to take a trauma-informed approach as an individual, and how can you explore what this would look like at an organizational level?

⁹ <https://dictionary.apa.org/traumatic-grief>

¹⁰ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/post-traumatic-growth>

¹¹ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma>

¹² <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>

SUPPORTING THE GRIEVER

Introduction

Nosei b'ol im chaveiro: Sharing a burden with one's friend

As a professional, you have the opportunity to help carry the burden of grief with those who are grieving. This idea of providing accompaniment to the mourner reminds us of the traditional words we say upon leaving the shiva house, in which we offer comfort to the mourner and all who are in mourning, reminding the mourner that they are not alone in their experience of grief.

Grief vs mourning

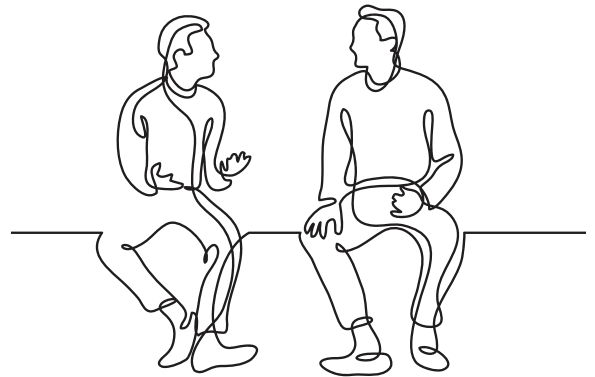
Grief is the "anguish experienced after significant loss... such as the death of a beloved person."¹³ It is the internal experience, while mourning is the outward expression of the thoughts and feelings an individual is experiencing.

How to approach the griever and start the conversation to offer your support

The universal struggle for supporting those who are grieving is feeling like they need to have the "right" thing to say. To put all anxiety at ease- there is no such thing. The *intention* or *kavanah* we approach people with is far more important than the words we choose to say.

Depending on your role, you may interact and support the griever at different points in their journey. You may consider:

- Privately offering words of comfort and welcome.
- Letting the griever know you are aware of their situation and are available for support whatever that may look like at any point in time.
- Allowing for emotional space when you are talking with them, silence is okay.
- Offering a statement acknowledging the grief in the community and your availability as a professional to provide support to those in need.



There are some things to keep in mind and to share with the individuals who are supporting the griever.

- It is important to understand what the griever needs and/or is ready for: Do they need someone to listen? Comfort? Offer assistance? It is not the responsibility of the supporter to "fix" any aspect that the mourner is experiencing or provide a distraction- it is impossible to do anyway.

¹³ <https://dictionary.apa.org/grief>

When will someone who is grieving need your support?

Traumatic events, such as a traumatic death out of time, can have short and long-term effects as the individual processes the trauma. The role of the professional in responding to the needs of the griever is to offer presence and support so that the griever knows you are available. You may consider:

- Trauma impacts each individual differently; some may need support immediately, others may need support later on, and yet others may need ongoing support.
- You can offer your presence and support generally, while being mindful of respecting the privacy of those most directly impacted by the traumatic experience.
- Consider offering or helping to create a support system for logistical support for the tasks needing attention in the immediate wake of a traumatic death, eg: going to the funeral home to make arrangements, securing death certificates, dealing with the process of closing accounts, securing and emptying a now empty home, etc.

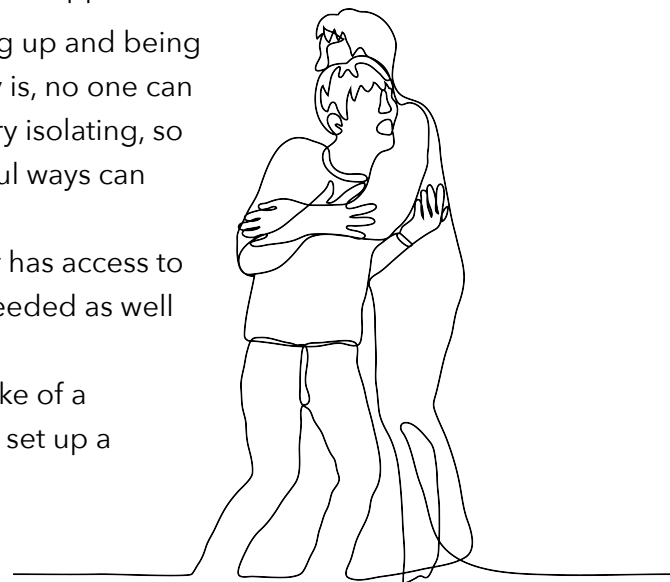
There are challenges that individuals won't be able to anticipate, things that trigger them without any prior notice. These can happen at any time, no matter how much time has passed. People who have experienced a traumatic death will need support at various times.

- Things that can be anticipated - Birthdays, anniversaries, yahrzeits, graduations, holidays, big life milestones, etc.
- Things that might not be anticipated - Unexpected moments, something that makes you think of your loved one, small milestones, when you hear your loved ones favorite song, etc.

What can you do to support someone who is grieving a traumatic death?

Be present with them and/or helping to create a system of support

- We often underestimate the value of showing up and being present during challenging times. The reality is, no one can change or "fix" the situation. Grief can be very isolating, so having someone who shows up in meaningful ways can make a huge impact.
- Talk with them and/or assess that the griever has access to someone to talk to, both professional/s as needed as well as social support.
- Practical support is vital in the immediate wake of a traumatic death. This may include helping to set up a meal train, taking over carpool, etc.



Support them in their own self-care

- Self-care is the time in which we focus on our different needs to improve our physical and mental health.¹⁴ Self-care isn't one size fits all and can include basic needs. We have different parts of ourselves that need care and attention.
- In a professional role, it is important to engage in your own self-care, as well as support the griever in their self-care journey. You can support the person who is grieving by sharing the Self-Care Wellness Wheel activity and/or by engaging in these activities with them, or helping them to think through or identify ideas, can make this task feel less daunting.
- It is also important to notice when you are feeling burdened by the work of caring for others and thinking about how you can refill yourself.



Ask them how they want to be supported

Asking someone how they would like to be supported can be incredibly powerful. It permits the person grieving to share their needs, it demonstrates you are an open and safe person to talk with, and it establishes expectations and boundaries. The griever's needs may shift and change. Having this conversation allows you to know what they are and gives the griever space to update you when they need something that is different.

What types of questions can you ask to find out how someone would like to be supported? Don't shy away from mentioning the loss; it is front and center in their thoughts. (You may also suggest they complete the "Who, what, when, where" activity themselves).

- Do you want to talk about the person who has died? Do you want to talk about their death? Will you let me know if you want to?
- Do you want to share memories of the person who has died with me and can I share stories with you?
- How do you want me to talk about them or their death?
- May I check in on you?
- Would you like to walk?

Offering practical support is essential. These losses are not only emotional assaults; they are utterly disruptive to entire lives and families. Consider asking:

- May I bring you dinner tonight?
- Can I help create a plan to support your childcare responsibilities?
- Shall we make arrangements to have your laundry, cleaning, and related household chores taken care of for the time being?

¹⁴ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

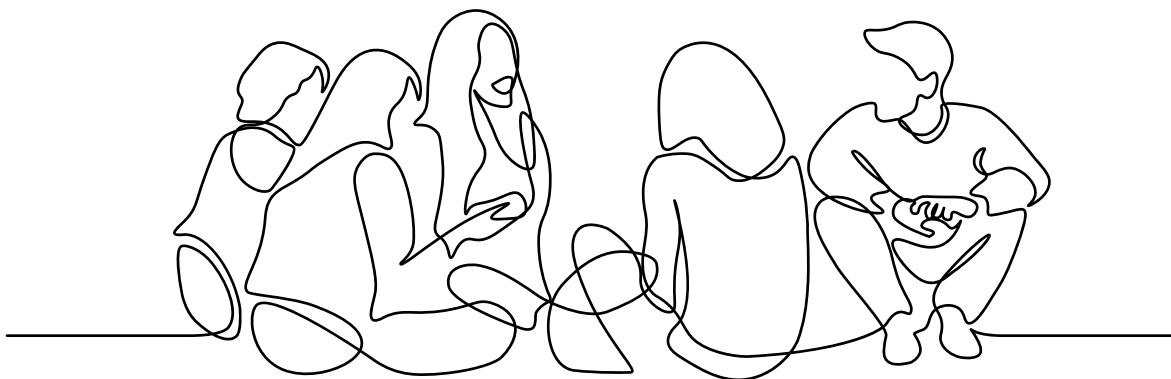
Assure them however they want to be supported is OK, and you understand that how they need to be supported will change over time. Remind them not to worry about etiquette, expectations, or hurting your feelings.

Know what professional mental health support is out there

Think about what resources are available in your community that you can recommend and guide them through. It can be overwhelming to identify these resources following the death of a loved one. Understanding and helping the griever navigate or access them when they are overwhelmed or are struggling to begin this process can be incredibly meaningful.

There are many types of therapy available for those who are grieving. Therapy typically involves learning about and normalizing the grieving process and can be done in individual and/or group settings. In particular, grief responds well to group work because it normalizes the grief and makes the overwhelming nature of it less scary. There is tremendous power in connection and validation from people who are going through something similar.

- To find a local grief group, you can...
 - ❖ Use resources on the NAMI website to search for a group. Both in person and virtual are available.
 - ❖ Connect with bereavement centers at your local hospitals and health care facilities.
 - ❖ Reach out to your local Jewish Family Service organization to see what bereavement resources they have available.



SUPPORTING YOURSELF

Introduction

Tikkun olam & hanefesh: Repairing the world & the soul

The work of repairing the world begins with repairing the soul. We must take care of ourselves in order to care for others. If you are going to support someone who is grieving, you need to ensure you are supporting yourself. Traumatic death affects everyone differently and may affect you in ways you don't anticipate.

How can a traumatic death trigger or impact the professionals supporting the griever?

Triggers and second-hand trauma¹⁵

- A trigger is an action or situation that elicits a physical or emotional reaction. Triggers are different for everyone, and the effects vary widely for each person. Traumatic events can be triggering for people both during and after the event. Supporting someone who has lost someone to a traumatic death may affect and/or trigger you in unexpected ways.
- Symptoms from secondary or second-hand trauma are just as real and significant as if someone had experienced the event themselves. The triggers someone experiences after a traumatic death that didn't directly affect them are real. Being exposed to traumatic circumstances can activate our own fear/anxiety response system, which can have similar effects as with the primary person experiencing the trauma. Additionally, sharing space with someone going through traumatic grief can also bring up our own memories and fears around the traumatic event, whether or not there is a direct, logical connection.

Once someone has experienced a trigger, it can be helpful to take time to find what the trigger was and identify ways to get support if this happens again. Practicing self-care can also help to prevent and alleviate the severity of triggers.

Consider how the trauma may trigger or impact you as a professional

- Resurface our own past traumas
- Heighten our awareness of mortality, including potential fears
- Trigger anxiety
- Identify sources of support for you as the professional

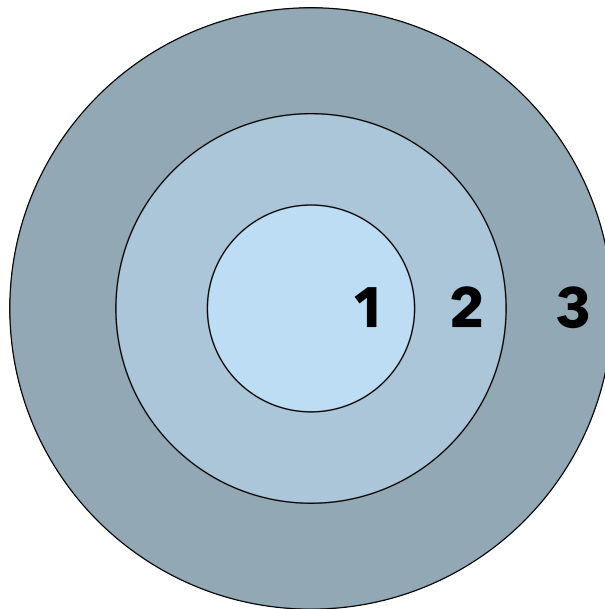


¹⁵ <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/January-2022/Understanding-Mental-Illness-Triggers>

How to support yourself while supporting the griever

Ensure that you, the professional, have support. When we are supporting someone who has directly experienced traumatic death, it is important we are intentional about supporting ourselves as well as the griever. Sometimes caregivers help others and ignore their own needs. If your role is to care for others, it is important to consider the impact of caregiving and ensure you receive support as well. The 'supporter' role can be complex. This person is balancing different roles, both grieving the traumatic death and supporting the primary person grieving. We want to "support in and dump out" - to recognize that our role is to provide support to people who are closest to the traumatic event, and to seek support for ourselves from those who are at a greater remove from the trauma than us.

Activity: Circles of Support



1. Person who has lost someone to a traumatic death
2. The supporter (you)
3. People you can lean on for support

Things to consider as a professional

- Identify your boundaries: What do you need to be present as well as to support yourself? How do you know when you're doing too much? How can you set appropriate limits with the griever? Without boundaries, you can become fatigued easily and eventually will burn out.

Activity: Who, What, When, and Where

It is important we support ourselves as we grieve. Use this resource to help you think through how you can support yourself during challenging moments, identify when you might need external support, and what your boundaries are in order to take care of yourself.

Self-care

As a professional, it is incredibly important to engage in your own self-care. Not only are you supporting the griever, but you are also managing your own grief of the traumatic death.

- How might you create a circle of support for yourself?
- Who do you turn to when you are having a hard day?

Activity: Self Care Wellness Wheel

Self-care means focusing on our different needs to improve our physical and mental health.¹⁶ It isn't one size fits all; it can include basic needs. One way to think about self-care is to break it down into dimensions.¹⁷ Zero in on the part of you that needs support to make self-care more effective, keeping in mind self-care does not need to be extravagant.

Self-care can include small acts such as being present in the moment, savoring the food you are eating, or enjoying the sunshine when you step outside. Practicing self-care can also help to prevent and alleviate the severity of triggers.

Professional mental health support

There are a lot of big emotions tied to death – especially traumatic death. The impact of second-hand trauma and triggers are very real. In some cases, self-care and a strong support system are enough to process and work through this experience. In other cases, professional mental health care can provide the additional support needed to navigate this experience. Traumatic death affects everyone differently, so there is no right or wrong way to navigate it, and it is important to know support is available.



¹⁶ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

¹⁷ https://mfpc.samhsa.gov/ENewsArticles/Article12b_2017.aspx

JEWISH TRADITIONS AROUND DEATH

Introduction

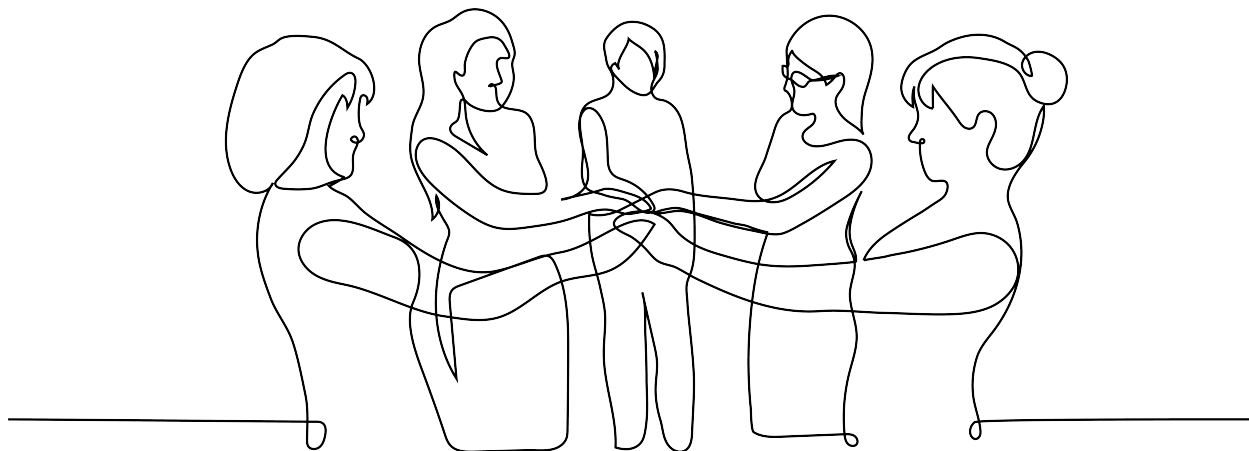
Refuah shleimah: Healing and wholeness

Judaism has a long tradition of recognizing that healing is not just physical. It is holistic, which is to say it has physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual components that are all interconnected. Healing is a process that has many components, and may be a lifelong journey. While ultimately we may strive toward healing for those in grief, in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic death, the goals for care are focused on creating and providing supportive space for the mourners to grieve. This is the function of traditional Jewish mourning rituals, detailed below.

Professionals in the Jewish community may or may not know about these rituals, but they can be helpful in these challenging moments, and they may or may not be observed by the griever in their communities.

Upon Learning of the Traumatic Event

- According to Jewish tradition, it is customary to say the words, “baruch dayan ha’emet” – “Blessed is the judge of truth” upon learning of a death. For some, this theological idea can be difficult – the idea that God is acting as judge in a traumatic death. There is no one right way to grieve; Jewish traditions may or may not serve as a source of comfort, as each person experiences grief differently. Professionals can help support those grieving by reminding them of what they, the griever, know to be true, whether it be the love shared between those who are grieving and the one/s who died, or the positive attributes of the one/s who died, etc – there is truth to be found in what is known, which can be comforting in the face of the many unknowns. Some say this phrase upon tearing their clothing over their heart, or a ribbon they wear during shiva as an outward sign of mourning. This may be done upon learning the news or at the funeral.



Jewish traditions and structure around mourning

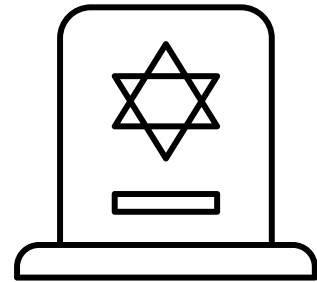
Jewish tradition prescribes a series of phases for a mourner to go through to help them reenter society while honoring the loss of their loved one. Having this wisdom to follow may provide comfort, knowing that these experiences have been part of Jewish culture and tradition for centuries. Engaging with Jewish practices can also be a helpful reminder that you are not alone in your journey. It is important to remember that Jewish traditions and wisdom might not provide comfort for everyone and that is ok.

- While these Jewish traditions are the same regardless of how someone has died, a traumatic death out of time may lead mourners to wonder about mortality and death in a new way. This information is included in this resource as a source of context and education around Jewish practices. Professionals should work to support mourners to find rituals and practices that are comfortable for them.

When we work in the Jewish community, we are supporting our communities through lots of moments, and one of those moments can be supporting them through a death out of time. Here is a quick guide to the Jewish rituals that may be involved:

Funeral¹⁸

- Jewish funerals typically take place very soon after death. Jewish practice dictates that a body should be returned to the earth as quickly as possible, to uphold the highest degree of respect for the dead. Funerals can take place in a variety of locations such as a synagogue, funeral home, or graveside, at a cemetery. Following a ritual washing, the deceased is dressed in a plain burial shroud, and burial is done in a plain pine box to allow the body to return to the earth as naturally as possible. Jewish funeral traditions do not include open caskets.



Shiva

- The first week after the funeral is known as shiva, literally meaning “seven.” During shiva, the mourners’ physical, spiritual, and emotional needs are met by the community. Friends, relatives, and community members visit, bring food for the household, and hold prayer services to allow the mourners to say kaddish without having to leave their home. The intent of shiva is for the community to support the mourners as they are processing their loss before reentering the world.

¹⁸ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-funeral-or-levaya/>

- Attending a shiva after a death: The responsibility of those not directly affected by the death is simply to show up, to demonstrate support through their physical presence at the height of the mourners' grief
- It is traditional for those visiting a shiva house to refrain from speaking until the mourner speaks, giving space to the mourner to decide if and how much they want to talk. Once the mourner starts speaking, those paying their condolences often share stories about the person who has died, beginning to preserve their memory as part of the grieving process.
- It is customary to provide food for the mourners, so they do not need to be burdened by the tasks of acquiring and preparing food in the immediate days after suffering a loss. This may look like a friend or two organizing a google doc or using a site like Take Them A Meal to allow others to sign up to bring specific meals or to send gift cards for those not in close proximity. When visiting a shiva house, it is not necessary to bring anything, although some may choose to bring food for the mourners.
- In a shiva home, mirrors are often covered with sheets, and shoes are not worn by the immediate mourners, symbolizing that we are not concerned with vanity at the height of grief. Mourners may also sit on chairs lower to the ground as a physical representation of their status as mourners, not quite on equal footing with everyone else during shiva.
- Upon leaving a house of mourning, Jewish wisdom teaches that those visiting the mourners say the following words, traditional among families from Ashkenazi backgrounds: *HaMakom yinachem etchem b'toch sha'ar avlei Tzion v'Yerushalayim...* may God comfort you **among the other mourners** of Zion and Jerusalem, signaling to the mourner they are not alone in their experience of grief. (Sephardic custom offers: *Min hashamayim tenachumu* – from the heavens, may you (plural) be comforted.)
- Following the week of shiva, it is custom for mourners to take a walk around the block, signifying their reentry into the world beyond their immediate time of mourning. Supporting the mourner in this transition can include offering to accompany them on the walk around the block. It may also look like listening to their stories and memories even as they may be repeated, in the time beyond shiva.

Shloshim

- The next stage is shloshim, literally meaning “thirty,” the 30-day period after the funeral. During this time, mourners return to daily life, such as work and school, but are not yet completely back in the world. During shloshim, mourners traditionally refrain from haircuts and avoid parties, live music, and other forms of public entertainment.
- During this period, we can support mourners by asking how they are doing, offering to help with everyday tasks, and creating space for them to express their grief to those they trust.

Kaddish

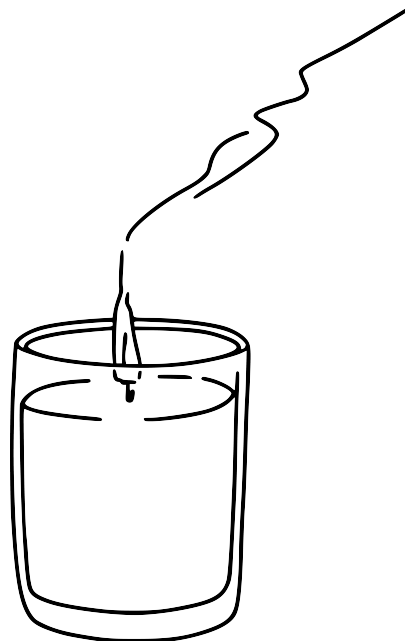
- The Mourner's Kaddish is another ritual that can provide support during the grieving process. Traditionally, it is recited at the funeral, daily during shiva, for 30 days following the death of a child, spouse, or sibling, and for 11 months following the death of a parent. This prayer does not reference death; it is simply a declaration of gratitude for life.

Activity: Write Your Own Mourner’s Kaddish

For the person you have lost

Yahrzeit

- The yearly anniversary of a loved one’s death, it is often observed at home by lighting a yahrzeit candle that burns for 24 hours and going to synagogue to recite Kaddish.



Returning to routine

- Immediate - In the time immediately following a death, those who are supporting the griever often adjust their routines to be present following the death, at the funeral and during shiva.
- Returning to Routine - As you look toward the longer term, consider the ways you can help the griever to maintain connection to the things and people that bring them joy in their life, helping them get back into routines like regular exercise, or other activities that are in line with their comfort level.
- Long Term - It is important to remember that the griever will need continued support as they process their grief. See the "Supporting the Griever" section for ways to maintain a connection with the griever and help them feel supported in ways that are meaningful for them.
- It is important to remember to support yourself during the time immediately following the death in the long term. See the "Supporting Yourself" section for ways to care for yourself and thoughts on seeking your own support.

Choosing a Charity

- It is custom to select one or more charitable organizations or causes to receive donations made by others in memory of those who have died. These charities are often included in announcements of the death, at the funeral, etc.
- Consider the causes most important to the person/s who have died. Did they have a specific organization where they volunteered or donated money? Are there Jewish organizations with which they were affiliated who might benefit from contributions in their memory?

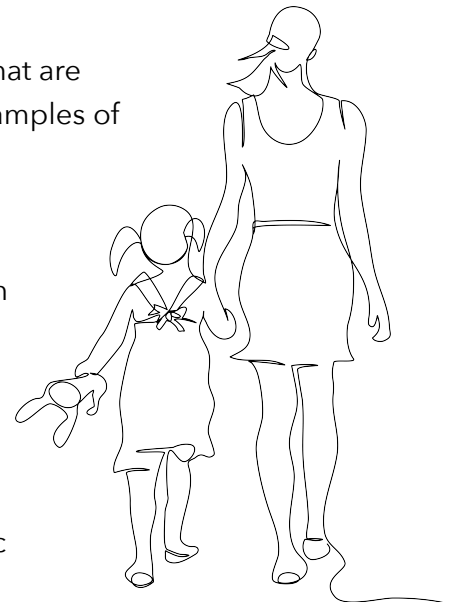
Rituals

Those supporting the griever may find it helpful to identify rituals that are meaningful/bring them joy/provide the mourners with comfort. Examples of Jewish rituals include:

- Lighting candles on Shabbat
- Reciting a mi sheberach for grief
- Going to synagogue or joining by Zoom to recite Kaddish

Memorialization

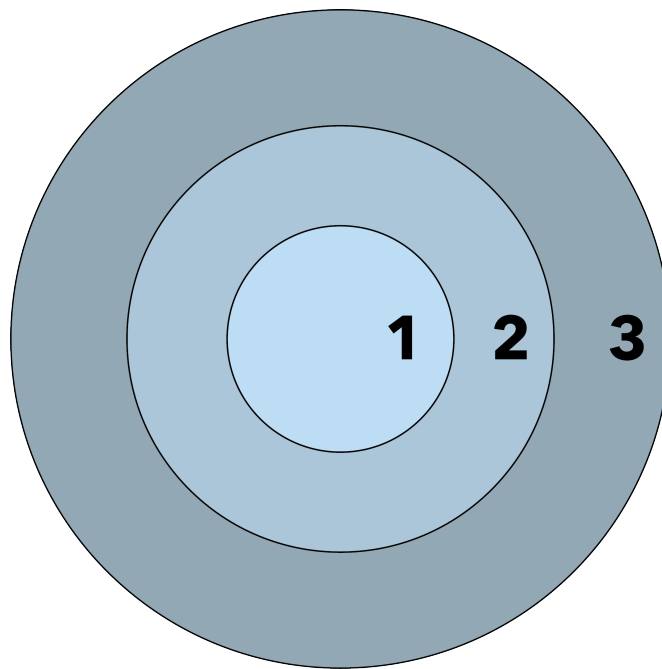
- Professionals can consider offering support to the griever to identify ways to memorialize those who have died, whether by marking space, and/or marking time. For example:
- Creating a physical memorial to those who have died in a specific communal space.
- Marking shloshim and/or yahrtzeit with a gathering of remembrance.



Activity: Circles of Support

When we are supporting another person who has lost someone to traumatic death, we need to be intentional about supporting ourselves as well. The 'supporter' role can be complex; we are both grieving the traumatic death and supporting the primary person grieving.

These concentric circles have been termed "the Ring Theory" by psychologists Susan Silk and Barry Goldman. We want to "lean in" to offer the support the primary person grieving needs, but we need to "lean out" to others for our own support. Complete the circles below following the prompts:



1. Person who has lost someone to a traumatic death
Who is the person/people you are supporting right now?
2. The 'supporter' (you)
How are you supporting yourself?
3. People you can lean on for support
Who are the people you can lean on to take care of and support you?

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Activity: Who, What, When, and Where

Whenever we grieve, it is important to remember to support ourselves. Use this resource to help you think through how you can support yourself during various challenging moments. You can answer as many questions as you feel like. You might think of additional questions as you are doing this; write them down along with some answers.

Who: Who are the people you can turn to?

- Who can I reach out to when I feel overwhelmed?
- Who can I reach out to for advice?
- Who can I reach out to when I need to vent?
- Who can I share stories with about the person I have lost?
- Who can I sit with quietly when I don't want to be alone?

What: What are things you can do to take care of yourself?

- What is one thing I can do to ground myself when I am struggling?
- What is one thing I can remind myself when I am having a bad day?
- What is one sign to alert me when I am struggling and need support?
- What is one strength or coping mechanism I can use when I am going through a tough time?

**When: When you are experiencing challenging moments,
how can you support yourself?**

- How can you support yourself when you know a big milestone is coming up, e.g., birthday, anniversary, yahrzeit?
- How can you support yourself when you experience a small moment you want to celebrate or share with the person you lost?
- How can you support yourself when something unexpectedly reminds you of the person you lost?
- How can you support yourself when you know something will remind you of the person you lost?

Where: Where might you experience grief, and how can you care for yourself?

- How do you care for yourself when you're at home?
- How do you care for yourself when you're at work/school?
- How do you care for yourself when you're with your family or friends?
- How do you care for yourself when you are outside of your comfort zone or somewhere new, such as when you're traveling?

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Activity: Self Care Wellness Wheel

Adapted from Northwest Missouri State Wellness Center

Self-care is the intentional time and space where we focus on our different needs to improve our physical and mental health. It isn't one size fits all; each part of ourselves needs care and attention in its own way. Jewish tradition builds in time and space where we can pause and take care of ourselves. During Shabbat, we pause and honor ourselves in ways that are meaningful to each of us.

One way to think of self-care is to break it down into different dimensions: social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and occupational/financial. Zeroing in on the part of you that needs support in the moment can make self-care more effective.

Imagine a tire on a bike or a car. When your tire is flat, it makes it difficult to steer. It may make the ride bumpy/shaky, cause a wreck or stop you from reaching your destination. Understanding which dimension of your tire needs to be filled can help you to approach self-care in a more intentional way.

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Wellness Dimensions:

Dimension One: Physical

Body, nutrition, healthy habits.

This dimension considers overall health and what you need to do to maintain a healthy quality of life. It is the ability to take charge of your health by making conscious decisions to be healthy.

Dimension Two: Financial/Occupational

Skills, finances, balance, satisfaction.

This dimension involves finding fulfillment in your job and knowing it has meaning. It is also the ability to establish balance between work and leisure time.

Dimension Three: Intellectual

Critical thinking, creativity, curiosity.

This dimension considers the desire to be a lifelong learner. It is the ability to be open to new experiences and ideas in order to continue growing.

Dimension Four: Emotional

Feelings, emotions, reactions, cognition.

This is the dimension where you are in touch with your feelings and emotions of sorrow, joy, love, etc. This helps us to cope with the emotional challenges of life.

Dimension Five: Social

Relationships, respect, community interaction.

This dimension considers how we relate to others. It is how we connect, communicate, and get along with the people we are surrounded by.

Dimension Six: Spiritual

Meaning, values, connection to a spiritual community.

This dimension helps to establish peace and harmony in our lives. It is the ability to discover meaning and purpose in life, whether it is individual or with a spiritual community.

How to use your Wellness Wheel

1. Six statements accompany each dimension of the wheel. Read each statement, and then pick (at least) three to color in. (You may do as many as you'd like.)
2. Fill in the corresponding pie-shaped section of the wheel to the degree you are achieving this statement. For example, question #1 is: "I eat a balanced nutritional diet." If you feel you are doing this 100 percent of the time, color in all of section 1. If you do this 60 percent of the time, color 60 percent of the section.
3. Complete this for as many sections of the wheel as possible. (Aim for at least half.)

Remember:

- Each person is unique. There is no "right" or "wrong" wheel or responses to the questions.
- Responses will vary, depending on age and stage of life. Additionally, it is just a snapshot in time. Your wheel today may look different from your wheel next week.
- Consider the wheel you have created as a source of feedback to use or not, based on how useful it feels.

Wellness Wheel Questions:

Dimension One: Physical

1. I eat a balanced nutritional diet.
2. I exercise at least three times per week.
3. I choose to abstain from sex, or sex is enjoyable and I practice safe sex.
4. I do not use alcohol or use it in moderation; I am a nonsmoker; I avoid street drugs.
5. I am generally free from illness.
6. I am a reasonable weight for my height.

Dimension Two: Financial/Occupational

7. I have a solid balance between saving for the future and spending for the present.
8. My beliefs/values around money are harmonious with my behavior.
9. What I am doing with work/school has purpose.
10. I use money positively, e.g., little or no gambling or excessive amassing of goods.
11. I have a balance between work/school and the other areas of my life.
12. I have financial plans for the future.

Dimension Three: Intellectual

13. I have specific intellectual goals, e.g., learning a new skill, a specific major.
14. I pursue mentally stimulating interests or hobbies.
15. I am generally satisfied with my education plan/vocation.
16. I have positive thoughts (a low degree of negativity and cynicism).
17. I would describe myself as a lifelong learner.
18. I commit time and energy to professional and self-development.

Dimension Four: Emotional

19. I have a sense of fun and laughter.
20. I am able to feel and label my feelings.
21. I express my feelings appropriately.
22. I have a sense of control in my life, and I am able to adapt to change.
23. I am able to comfort or console myself when I am troubled.
24. Others would describe me as emotionally stable.

Dimension Five: Social

25. I am able to resolve conflicts in all areas of my life.
26. I am aware of the feelings of others and can respond appropriately.
27. I have a close trusting relationship with at least three people.
28. I am aware of and able to set and respect my own and others' boundaries.

- 29. I enjoy satisfying social interaction with others.
- 30. I have a sense of belonging/not being isolated.

Dimension Six: Spiritual

- 31. I practice meditation, pray or engage in some type of growth practice.
- 32. I have a general sense of serenity.
- 33. I have faith in a higher power.
- 34. I have a sense of meaning and purpose in my life.
- 35. I trust others, and I am able to forgive others and myself and let go.
- 36. Principles/ethics/morals provide guides for my life.

Reflection

Which section of your wheel has the most color? The least color?

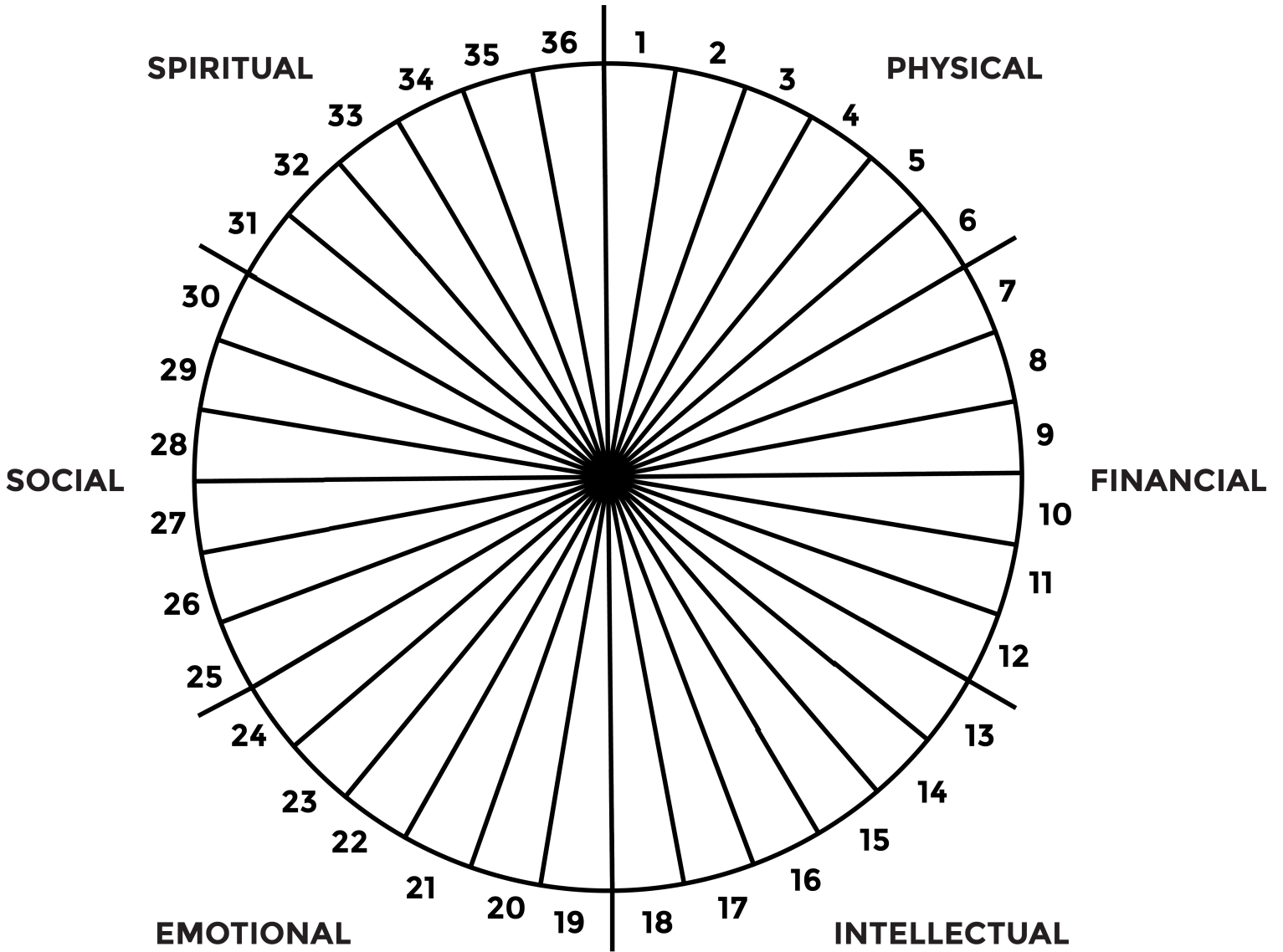
As a result of doing this assessment, I intend to improve my life balance by

My first step will be

I will share my plans with _____ and and will ask for their support by saying "_____."

I will review my progress on (date) _____ with them.

Self-Care Wellness Wheel



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Activity: Write Your Own Mourner's Kaddish

When someone in the Jewish community dies, we traditionally recite the Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer in Aramaic – the vernacular language in the 13th Century when it was written . While it is said in memory of someone who has died, the words of the prayer do not actually refer to death; rather, they celebrate and show gratitude for life.

Saying Kaddish can provide much-needed routine and structure in a life that has been upended by loss, and participating in a ritual Jews have been practicing for centuries gives one a feeling of being part of something larger.

1. Read through the English translation of the Mourner's Kaddish and see which parts of the traditional prayer resonate with you.
2. Use the reflective questions to help you think about the impact the person you have lost had on your life and the ways in which you hope to honor them.
3. Write your own Mourner's Kaddish in whatever way feels comfortable and authentic for you. You can write in a more traditional prayer format, as a poem, as a journal entry, or anything in between.
4. Think about the ways and times you can say or share your Mourner's Kaddish. You can share it with your family or religious community. You can recite it during their yahrzeit, when you visit their grave, or in moments when you are thinking about and missing them.

Mourner's Kaddish in English Translation

Exalted and hallowed be God's great name
in the world which God created, according to plan.
May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime
and the life of all Israel – speedily, imminently,
To which we say: Amen.

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted,
extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded
be the name of the Holy Blessed One,
beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing, praise, and comfort.
To which we say: Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all Israel.

To which we say: Amen.

May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel.

To which we say: Amen.

Mourner's Kaddish Transliteration

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di-v'ra
chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon
uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba'agala
uvizman kariv, v'im'ru: "amen."

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almaya.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam
v'yitnaseh, v'yithadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei
d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,
l'eila min-kol-birchata v'shirata, tushb'chata
v'nechemata da'amiran b'alma, v'im'ru: "amen."

Y'hei shlama raba min-sh'maya v'chayim aleinu
v'al-kol-yisrael, v'im'ru: "amen."

Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol-yisrael, v'imru: "amen."

Mourner's Kaddish in Aramaic

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא
בעלמא די ברא כרעותה וימליך מלכותה בתיכון וביומיכון
ובחיי דכל בית ישראל בעגלא ובזמן קריב, ואמרו אמן

יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיה

יתברך וישתבח ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא ויתהדר ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה דקדשא. בריך הוא
לעלא מן כל ברכתא ושירתא תשבחתא ונחמתא דאמירן בעלמא. ואמרו אמן

יהא שלמא רבא מן שמיה וחיים עלינו ועל כל ישראל. ואמרו אמן

עושה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל ואמרו אמן

Reflective Questions

Use these reflection questions as you are preparing to write your Mourner's Kaddish. Let them support you in reflecting on the person you have lost, the impact they had on your life, and how you hope to honor them in their physical absence. We want to acknowledge that you may have had a challenging relationship with the person you lost. Your Mourner's Kaddish should feel authentic to you and your experience. The questions below may or may not resonate with you.

What are the things you love about the person you lost?

In what ways was this person important in your life and/or in your family?

What was so special about this person to you?

What are the ways you remember them?

How do you honor them in your day-to-day life?

How do you honor them when you are experiencing milestones or big moments in life?

What are the ways you care for yourself in your day-to-day life?

How do you honor yourself, now that they are gone?

What do you want to prioritize in your life moving forward

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