

# Grief Responsive Teaching: Supporting Students and Ourselves in Times of Loss (An Introduction)

**Brittany Collins**

**March 9, 2022**

12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. PT / 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. ET



# ***SAMHSA*** **DISCLAIMER**

This training is offered through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and The School Crisis Recovery and Renewal (SCRR) and is funded by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and jointly coordinated by the University of California, Los Angeles, and Duke University, and is administered by the Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS). The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of SAMHSA.



**WELCOME.**



**SCHOOL CRISIS  
RECOVERY**  
and  
**RENEWAL**

## WHAT IS SCRR?

*Promoting effective and sustainable change in the ways school communities and school leadership builds the skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to recover and renew after a crisis.*

[www.schoolcrisishealing.org](http://www.schoolcrisishealing.org)

School crisis readiness is essential. Response is critical.

**And: what happens after matters, too.**



**School Crisis Readiness,  
Response, Recovery &  
Renewal**

**Readiness (Before a big thing)**

- Past, present & future
- Competencies, Collaboration & Communication

**Response (During a big thing)**

- Present
- Protection & reduction of harm; mitigation of panic, identifying harm tipping points, responding to death and grief



**Recovery (the week, month, year after a big thing)**

- Past & the present
- Connectedness & Commonality
- Safety & Stabilization, Remembrance & Mourning, Reconnection & Integration (adapted from Herman, 1992)

**Renewal (A year + after a big thing)**

- Present & the future
- Constructing a coherent narrative: what happened to us? With us? By us?
- Name, navigate, normalize
- Healing & meaning Making
- Creating & reimagining

# What is school crisis recovery?

Big thing happening

- Event(s) + Compounded experiences + Effects
- Disempowerment + Disconnection

Recovery

- Regaining a sense of agency (power)
- Reestablishing connection



## FOUNDATIONS OF RECOVERY

The recovery phase requires crisis leadership in the first three months, six months, and years after a harmful event. Judith Herman was one of the first psychologists to codify the importance of recovery in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). Herman posits that the central recovery modality is connectedness and commonality: finding peer support and resonance.

### Safety

Safety: Empowerment & restoring a sense of control

**Safety is a construct and is contextual.** Comprehensive safety includes more than physical safety; it also includes psychological, structural, interpersonal safety. Recovery leadership acknowledges the diverse experiences and needs that contribute to safety individually and collectively.

### Remembrance & Mourning

Commemoration and memorialization

**Remembrance and mourning is telling the story of the trauma or crisis (Herman, 1992).** This can happen collectively (assembly meetings) or separately by advisory, grade, classroom, etc. Recovery leaders plan for what spaces need to be held together as a whole, and which members need differentiated recovery spaces.

### Reconnection

Regulation, stabilization, re-orientation

**Reconnection is focused on creating a future in the context of the past and present hurt.** Recovery leaders bridge social connections to remind community members that, while crisis can fracture our connections to ourselves and each other, recovery encourages us to reconnect to ourselves and to each other.

COPING

RESILIENCE

POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

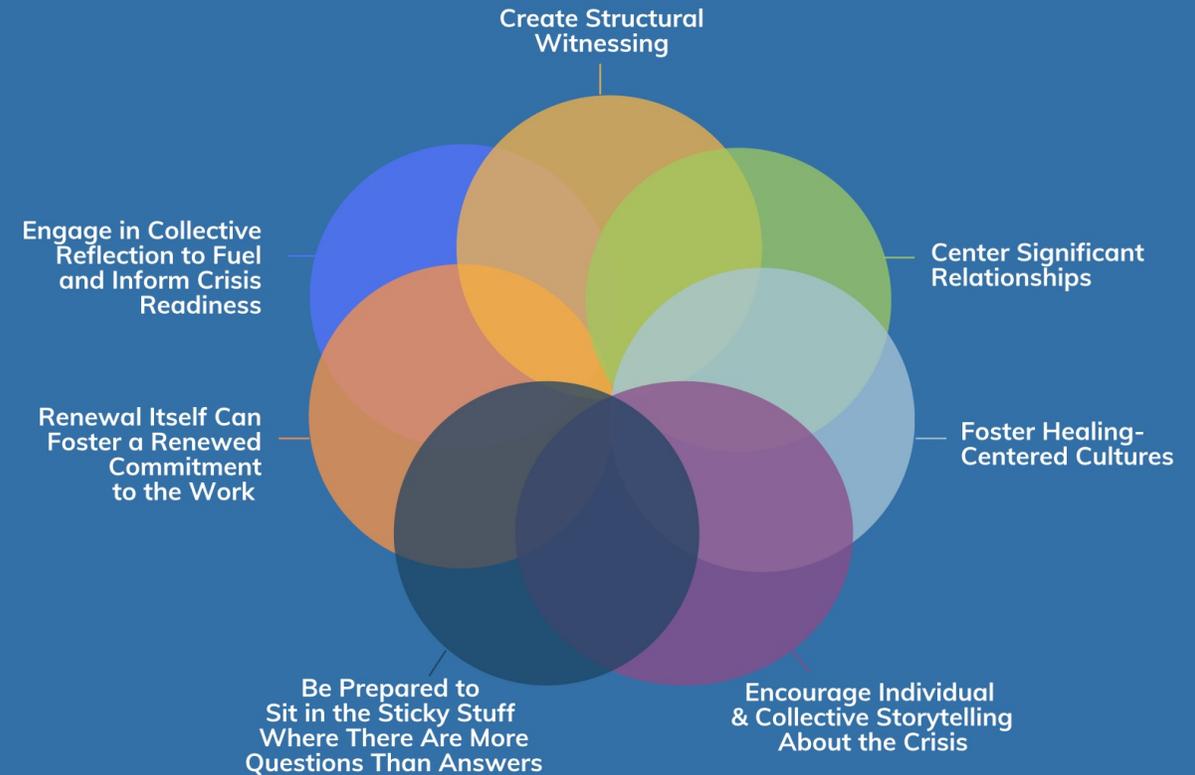
HEALING

MEANING MAKING



## ELEMENTS OF RENEWAL

This section introduces what renewal leadership looks like and offers seven elements that can foster school crisis renewal



Renewal involves the leaders themselves. This is the phase of crisis leadership where leaders are not only externally focused, but internally introspective. Renewal after a crisis asks for leaders of school communities, organizations, teams, or sites to help all involved make meaning of what is happening and what happened, to ground and try to make sense of things that don't make sense.

A big thing happens or continues to happen (e.g., the crisis) → disempowerment, disconnection

**Recovery Step 2:**

Reconstruct the story (the event, the response to the event, the responses of people in the community to the event, the responses of society to the event)

**Renewal:**

- Reflection & Meaning Making
- Integration of learnings and new awareness
- Analysis of root causes (examining the crisis and experience of the crisis from a social justice frame)
- Commitment to action (interruption, generation, and informing future crisis work)

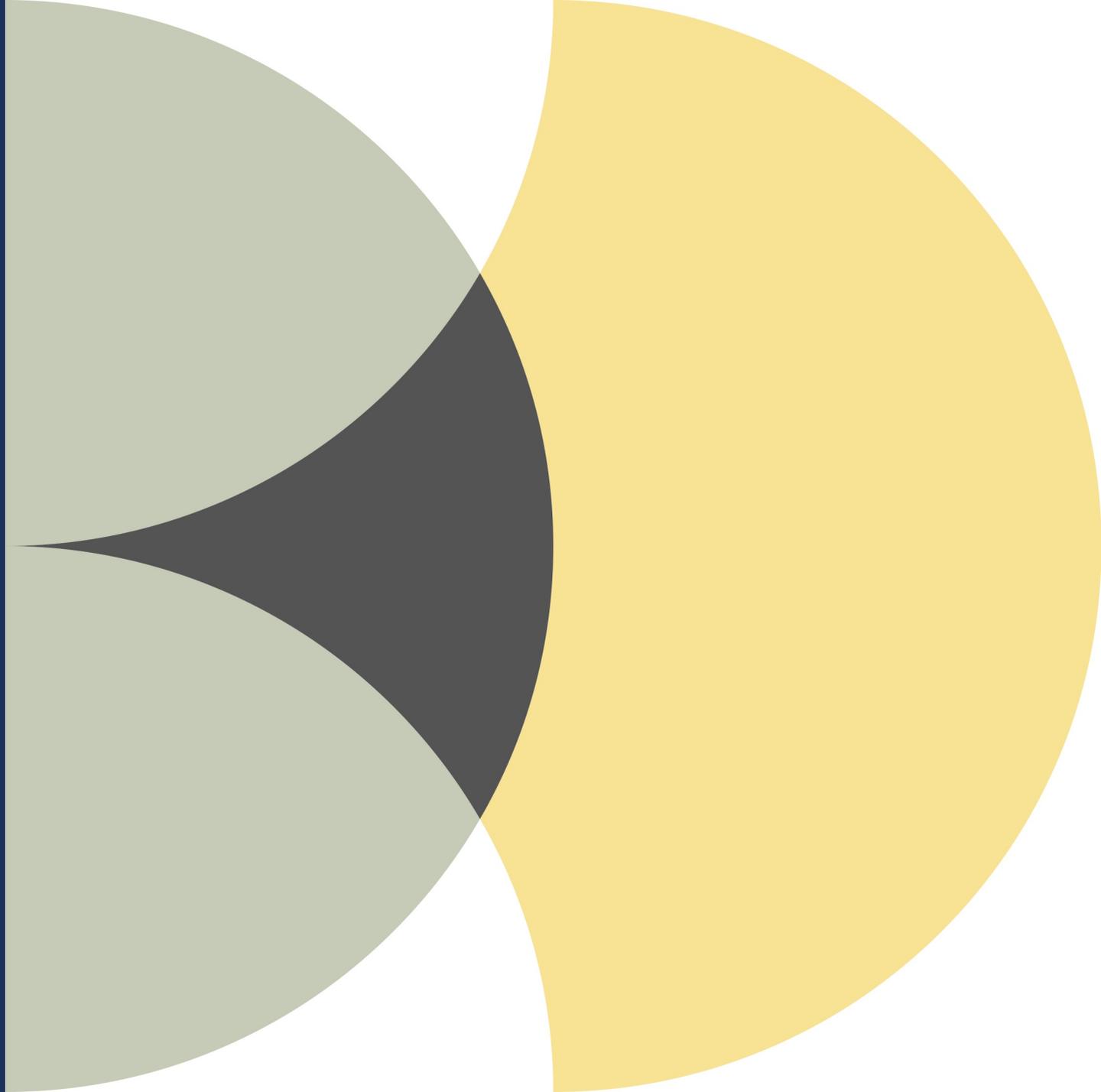


**Recovery Step 1:**  
Establish safety & stabilization

**Recovery Step 3:**  
Reconnection with life: Social action

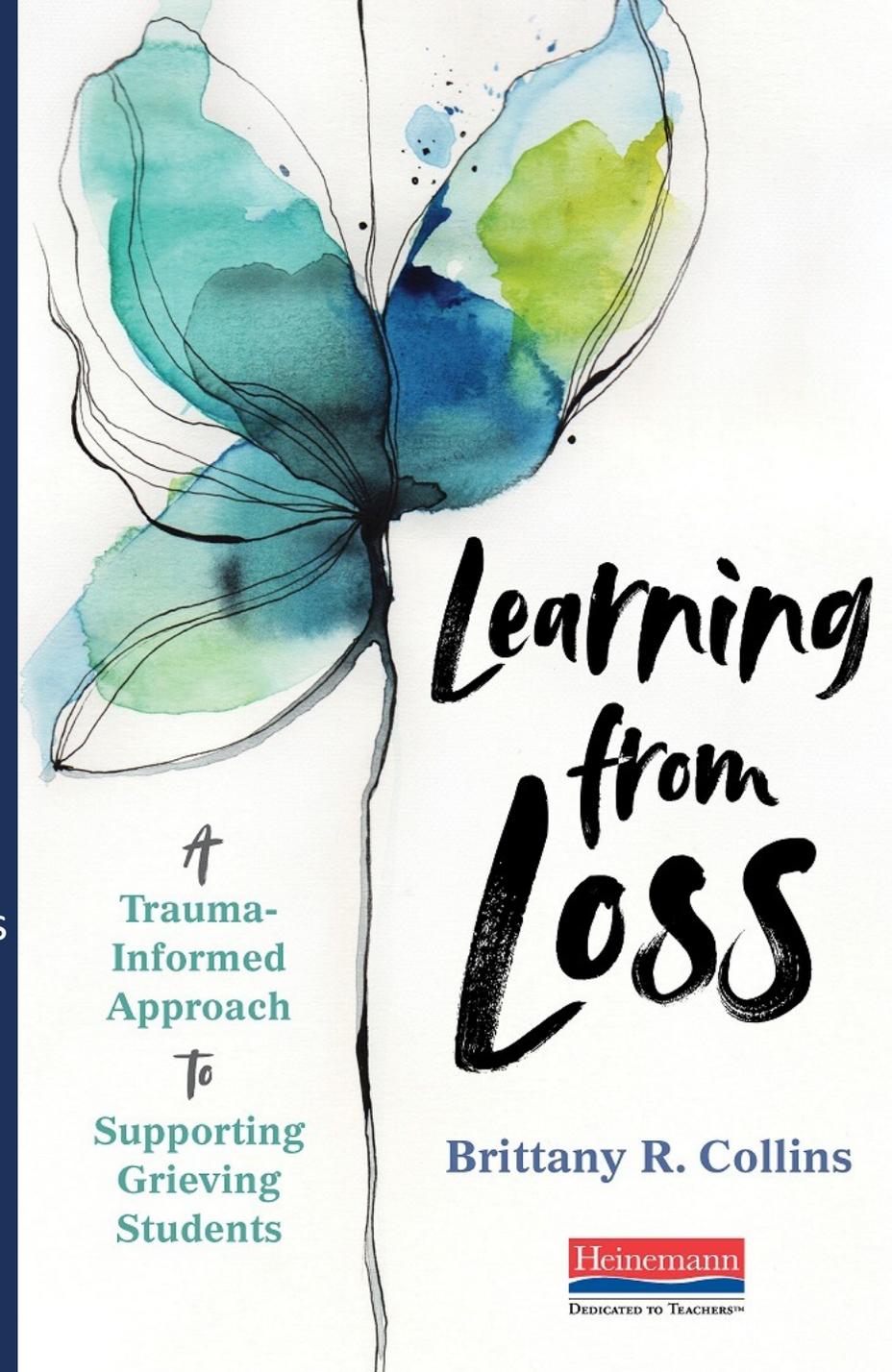
# Supporting Our Students & Ourselves in Times of Loss

By Brittany R. Collins



# My Positionality...

- Author, educator, curriculum designer from Western MA (Land acknowledgment: I teach and live on unceded Nipmuc land)
- Formerly bereaved student turned educator
- Mental health advocate, not trained professional
- Founder of Grief-Responsive Teaching & author of Learning from Loss



# Community Agreements...



- Prioritize our own and others' wellbeing
- Approach content as co-learners
- Speak from personal experience
- Participate on a "challenge by choice" basis
- Demonstrate active listening through affirmations ("I hear you..." and nonverbals)
- Stories shared in this space stay in this space
- And...?

# What is Grief-Responsive Teaching?



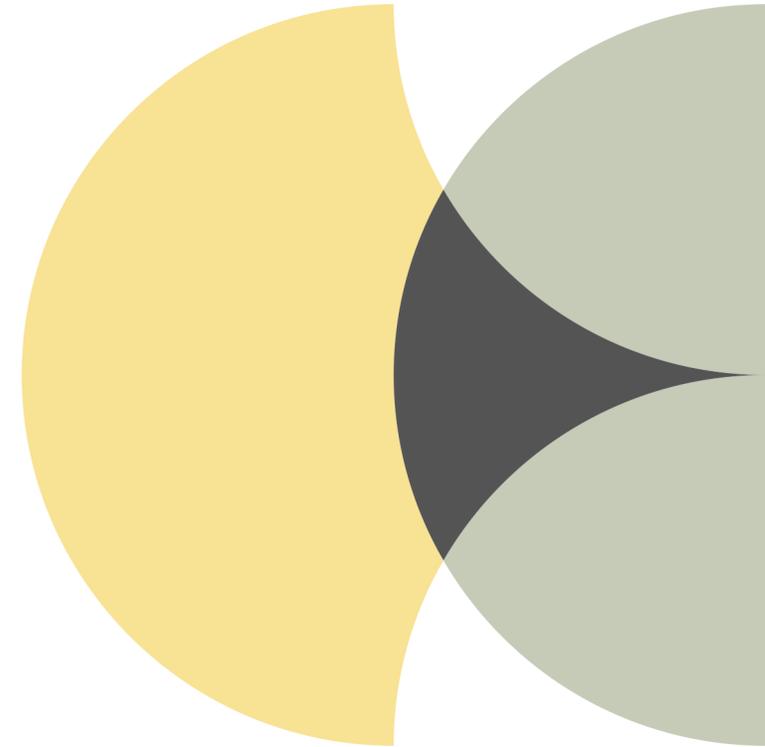
Grief-responsive teaching is a pedagogical and interpersonal approach to teaching, learning, counseling, and other forms of youth work that integrates science and stories of grief into actionable classroom practices that support young people's and adults' wellbeing in times of loss.

Because grief impacts the brain, body, and behavior— and, by extension, teaching and learning— grief-responsive teaching seeks to support and empower the whole person, socially, emotionally, culturally, and academically.

# Why is Grief-Responsive Teaching Important?

## Isn't this what school counselors are for?

- Loss is the most commonly cited traumatic experience among young people (Pynoos et al. 2014)
- Before COVID-19, 7 out of 10 teachers had a student in their classroom who was grieving (Nadworny 2015)
- 1.5 million children are bereaved due to COVID-19 worldwide, over 120,000 in the US, with BIPOC youth facing higher rates of loss (Levin 2021)
- "Nearly 1 in 5 students — about 8 million — don't have access to a school counselor at all, with nearly 3 million of those students also lacking access to school psychologists, social workers, or any other type of support staff" (Connery 2020)





## ACTIVITY: Word Cloud

When you consider the presence of loss in your learning environment, or when you think about working with grieving students, how do you feel?



# Grief impacts the brain, body, and behavior...

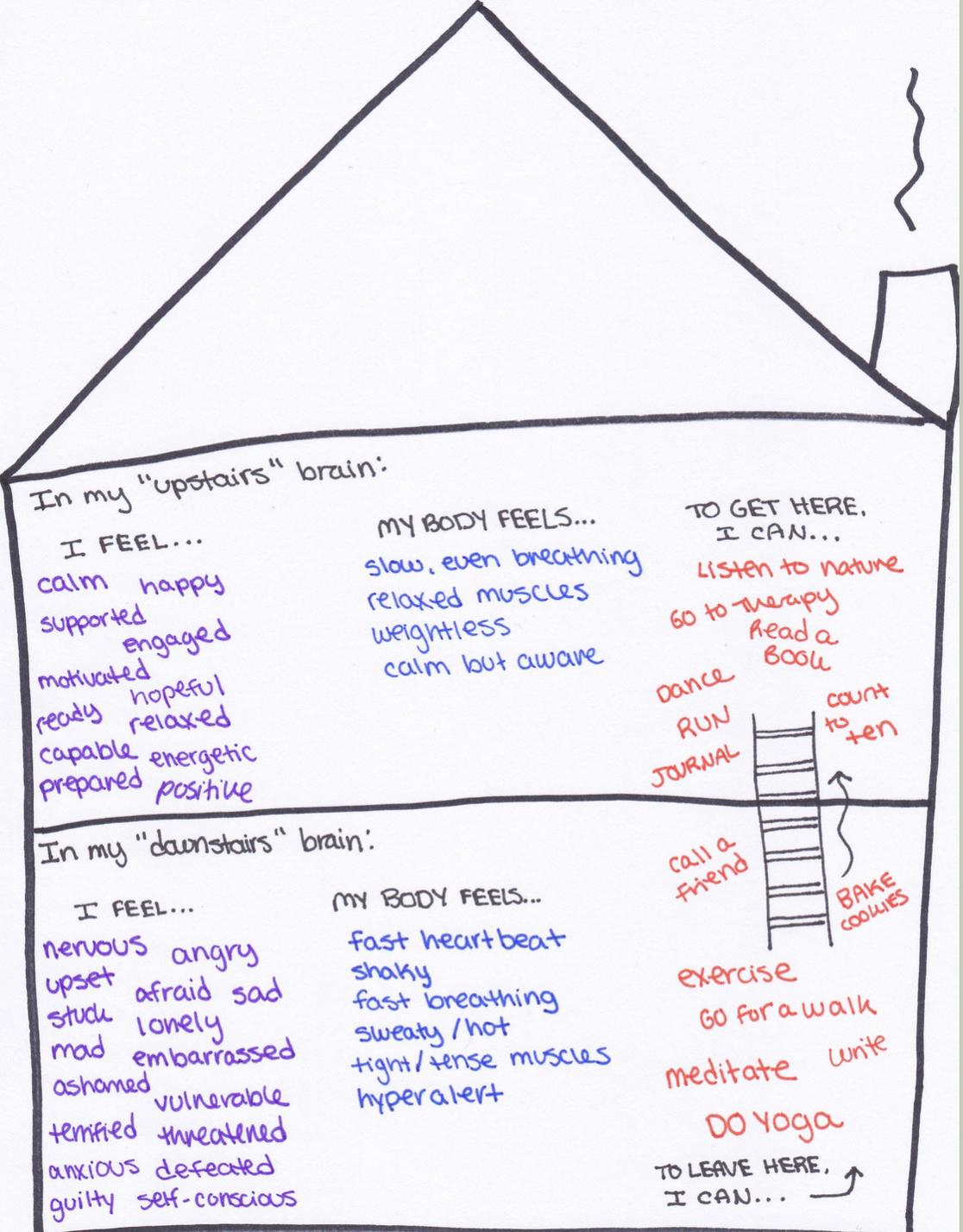


- Fight or flight response, followed by depressive response (Shulman 2012)
  - Involves almost every part of the brain (Shulman 2012)
  - Can impact physical wellbeing into adulthood
  - Can change behavior...

"Many... students are, in essence,  
having normal responses to not-OK things"

-- Souers & Hall 2016

perfectionism   people-pleasing   anger   avoidance   guilt   apathy  
denial   changes in sleep/eating   numbing   anxiety   fear   connection-seeking  
impaired sense of future   desire for control   headaches/nausea   catastrophizing  
people-pleasing  
attachment challenges   and more...



# ACTIVITY:

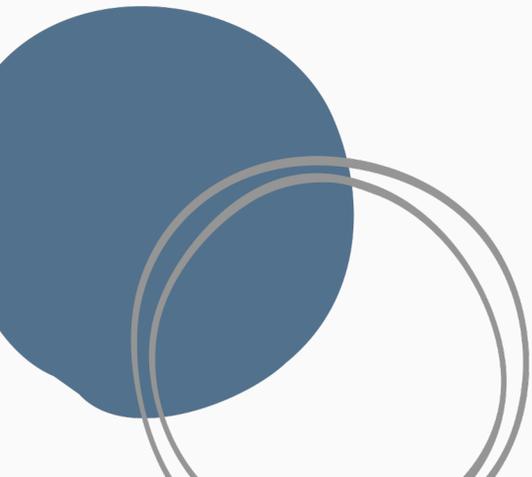
## Brain Building Diagram

- Both grief and trauma activate the sympathetic nervous system, which can get "stuck" in overdrive
- Dan Siegel refers to this as the "downstairs brain" (Souers & Hall 2016)
- The upstairs and downstairs brain have unique value
- Regulatory activities give us control

# BREAKOUT SESSION

In your group, share:

- One item from each Brain Building column
- 1 example of upstairs/downstairs brain moments from your working/learning environment
- 1 way you might use this activity, or the upstairs/downstairs brain concept, with your learners



# Interpersonal Relationships

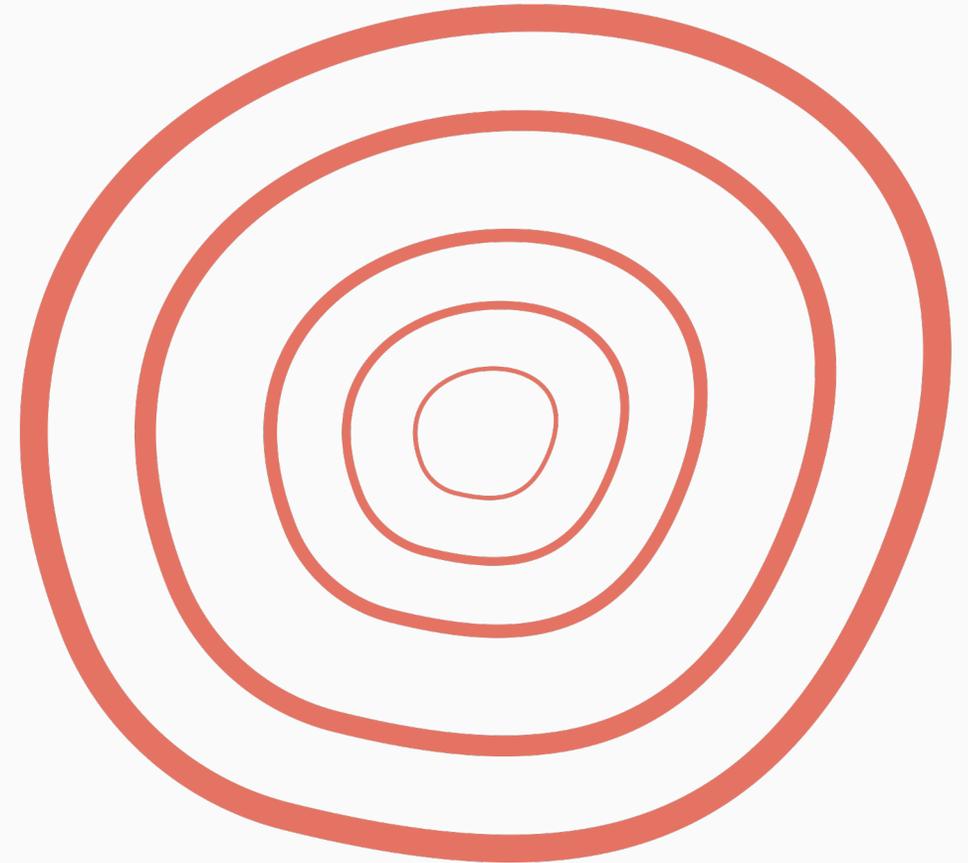


[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AzXX\\_2BrVk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AzXX_2BrVk)



# Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

- The individual (age, gender, sex, ability, etc.)
- The microsystem - immediate family, close friends, the people with whom one lives
- The mesosystem - school, neighborhood, places of worship
- The exosystem - news, media, parent's or partner's workplace
- The macrosystem - societal and cultural standards, norms, values, laws, etc.

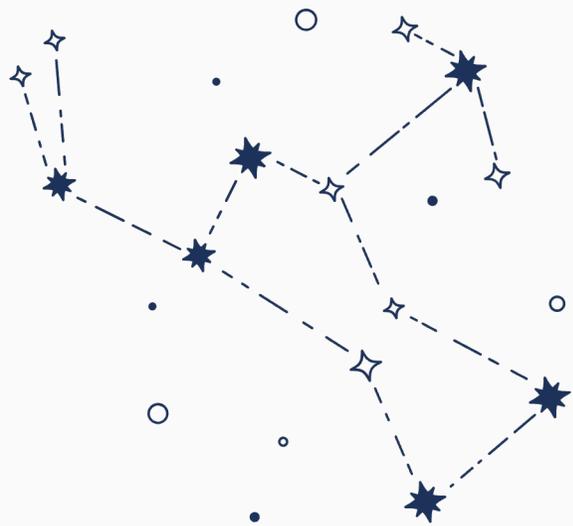


# ACTIVITY: Connection Constellation

Make a list of 5 people, places, or influences that support your wellbeing

Draw 6 dots on a piece of paper in any pattern,  
label each dot with the names from your list;  
the 6th dot is for your own name

Connect the dots and name your constellation



# Freewrite:

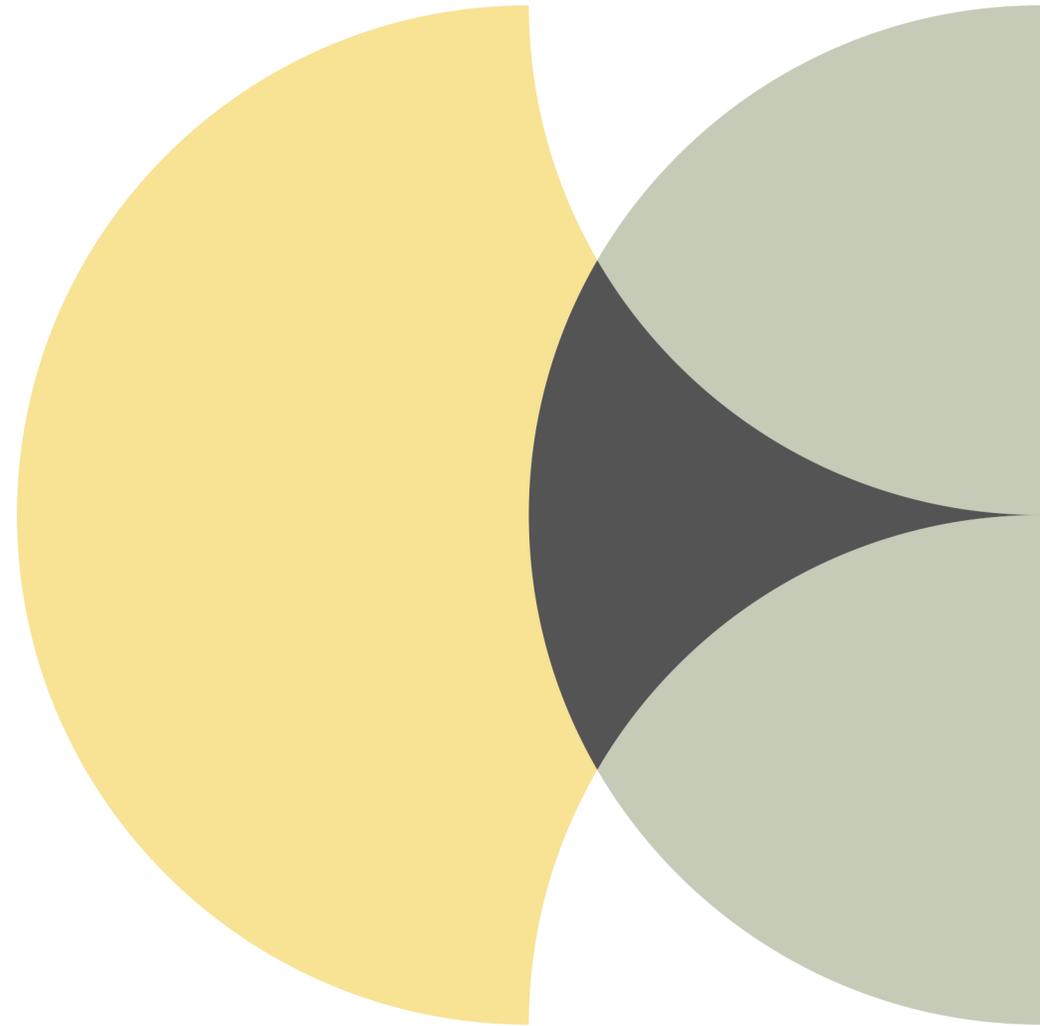


Pick one human connection from your constellation and consider:

How did/does this person and their actions make you feel? Why are they impactful?

What have you learned from this person?

Use emotion words - name your feelings (e.g. appreciative, challenged, inspired). (Pennebaker)



# The Power of Presence...

- Human connection is our greatest antidote to trauma (van der Kolk 2014)
- It only takes one caring adult to change the life of a young person experiencing adversity (Bluestein 2001)
- "Perceived Support Availability" is an important predictor of adjustment (Bodie, Collins 2021)
  - Support is not synonymous with saviorism (facilitating furthered connection)
- Expressive writing sparks physiological and psychological healing (Pennebaker)

# 4-Step CODE for Speaking w/ Grieving Students:

**COMPASSIONATE**  
**OPEN-ENDED**  
**DIRECT**  
**EVOLVING**



In action:

<https://www.dougy.org/assets/uploads/What-to-say-and-not-to-say.pdf>



Brittany R. Collins LLC

# ACTIVITY: Reflect & Respond

## Student Writing Edition



Breakout Room Activity Sheet (link in chat):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pNdxNv2MiTM-NQZJ-5qvwn9MdKJaUMVYvNSVgF55do8/edit?usp=sharing>

**Chat Reflection:**

Share 1 idea/moment/question from your conversation you hope to carry with you

# Vicarious Loss/Trauma

## The Cycle of Retraumatization at School

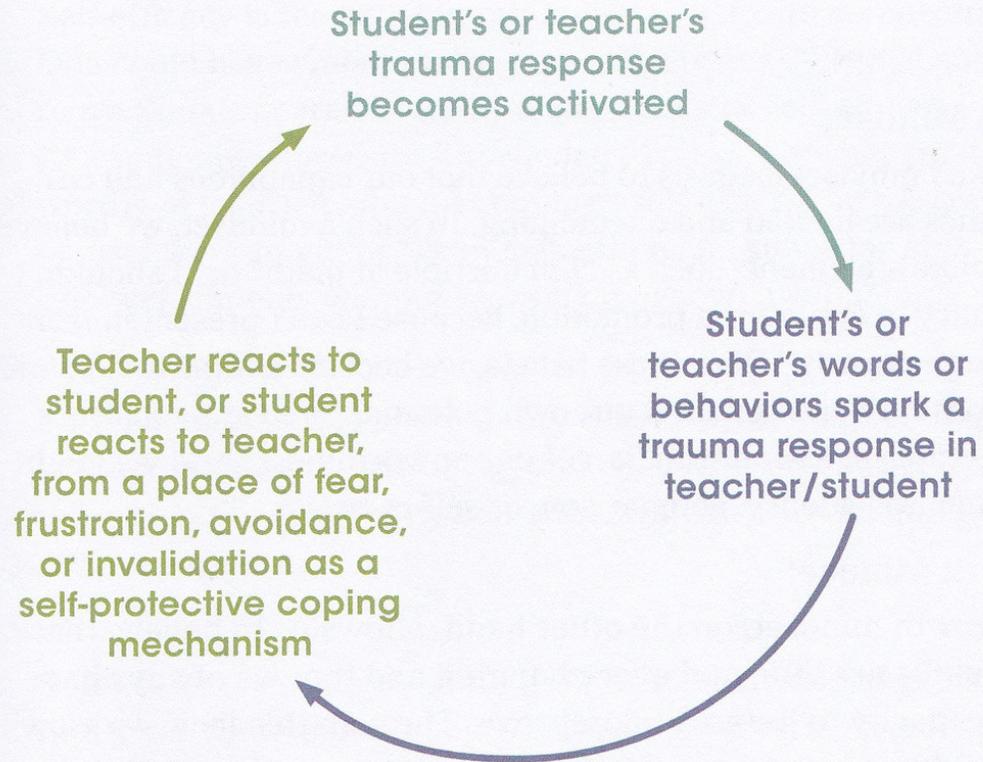


Figure 8-1 The Cycle of Retraumatization at School

- Teachers with a history of loss and/or trauma at higher risk
- Systemic cause, can't "self-care" your way out of a broken system
- Safety, connection, emotional regulation
- Connector vs. savior
- Professional support for students & teachers alike

# THANK YOU!

Keep in Touch:

Special discount code,  
Learning from Loss, [www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com)

Website: [www.griefresponsiveteaching.com](http://www.griefresponsiveteaching.com)

Instagram:

@griefresponsiveteaching

I used to think... Now I think...

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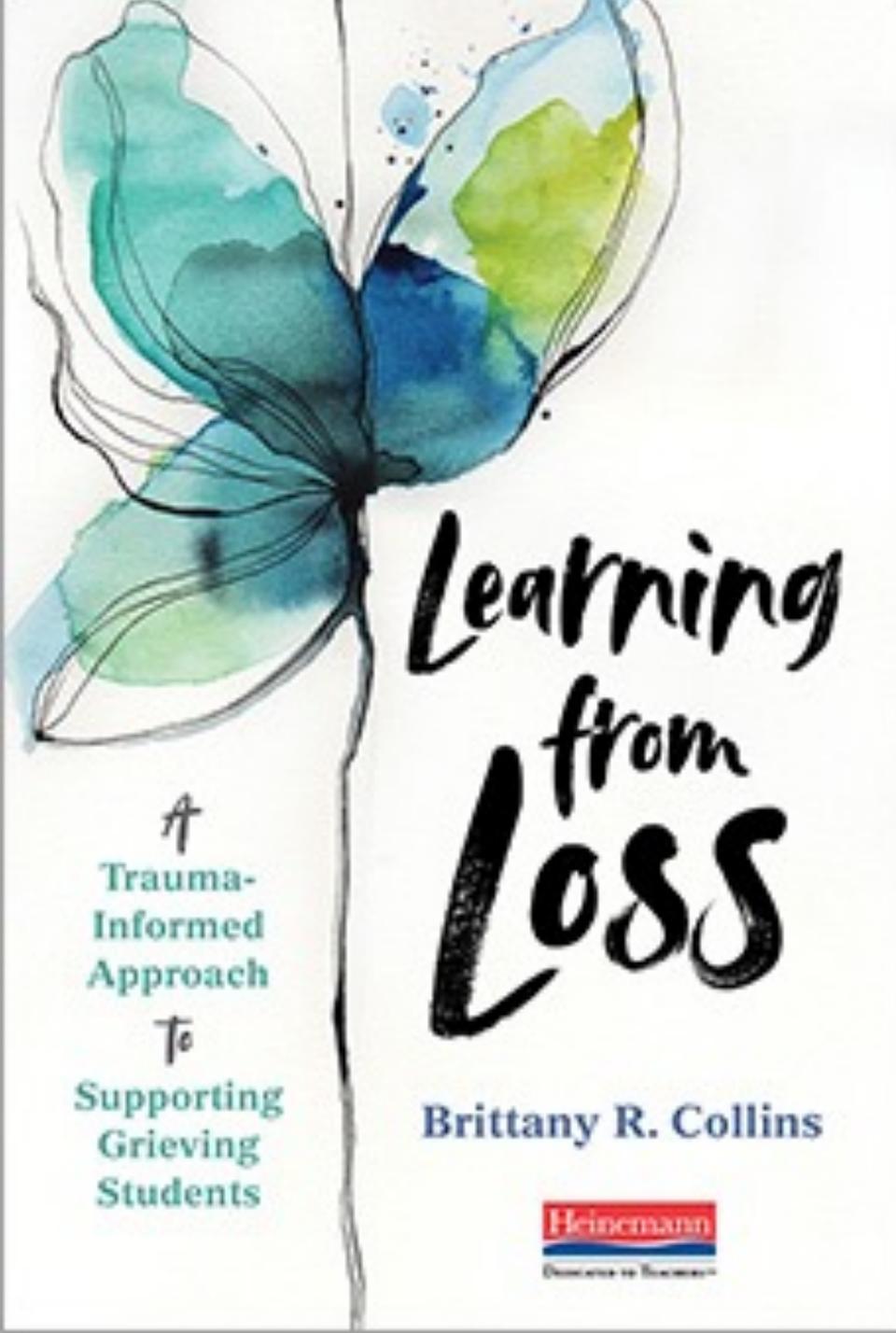
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**THANK YOU.**



# Join the SCRR x Learning from Loss Book Club!

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We're thrilled that Brittany is also leading a Learning from Loss book club! Open to all (you don't have to have attended the March workshop to join), join Brittany and your colleagues to explore environmental, interpersonal, and curricular grief responsive classroom strategies.

Together we'll explore tiered strategies (environmental, interpersonal, and curricular) and highlight educator well-being and a whole-school approaches.

- **Session 1 on March 31, 2022:** Creating a grief-responsive classroom environment
- **Session 2 on April 28, 2022:** Fostering grief-responsive relationships with students and colleagues
- **Session 3 on May 26, 2022:** Looking at curricula through a grief-responsive lens

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. PT / 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. ET

<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/grief-responsive-teaching-intro/>

# How did this land?



We want your feedback so we can make  
your experience better!

Please use the link in the chat.  
The evaluation link will also be shared in our  
follow-up email.

# Supporting Resources



## **Inner Harbor**

[inner-harbor.org/services](https://inner-harbor.org/services)

training, consulting and direct support for high school and college students)

## **HealGrief's [Actively Moving Forward](https://healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward/college-student-grief)**

support for grieving college students, virtual support groups + more)

[healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward/college-student-grief](https://healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward/college-student-grief)

## **Coalition to Support Grieving Students**

[grievingstudents.org](https://grievingstudents.org)

## **Grief Fact Sheets, trainings, and archived resources related to COVID 19, grief, loss, & bereavement**

[mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/responding-covid-19-grief-loss-and-bereavement](https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/responding-covid-19-grief-loss-and-bereavement)

## **College contexts + suicide postvention**

[sprc.org/resources-programs/postvention-guide-response-suicide-college-campuses](https://sprc.org/resources-programs/postvention-guide-response-suicide-college-campuses) (SPRC, 2014)

## **What's Your Grief?**

[whatsyourgrief.com/resources](https://whatsyourgrief.com/resources)

## **Grief Recovery Method**

[griefrecoverymethod.com](https://griefrecoverymethod.com)

## **The Dinner Party**

[thedinnerparty.org/resources](https://thedinnerparty.org/resources)

[Humanizing Grief in Higher Education- Narratives of Allyship and Hope](https://www.sheltonandseven.com/humanizing-grief-in-higher-education-narratives-of-allyship-and-hope) (Shelton & Sieben, 2021)

# Upcoming SCRR Opportunities



## **Post Secondary Grief Student Support: A Three-Part Training with Inner Harbor** (3<sup>rd</sup> session is March 25, 2022)

Join this 3-part intensive training to learn practical suggestions for working with grieving students while in college and explore how we can all contribute to a culture that promotes the expression of grief as a normal, natural process.

[Learn more and register](#)

## **Listen, Learn, and Lead: Consultancy Chats for School Systems Leaders** (March 11, and March 25, 2022)

Every other Friday in February and March, bring your questions, your site's challenges, your leadership hurdles to listen, learn, and lead one another by engaging in consultancy protocols.

[Learn more and register](#)

## **Re-writing Our Narratives: Cultivating Healing through Critical Literacy and Collective Care – A Critical Friends Group** (March 23 – May 18, 2022)

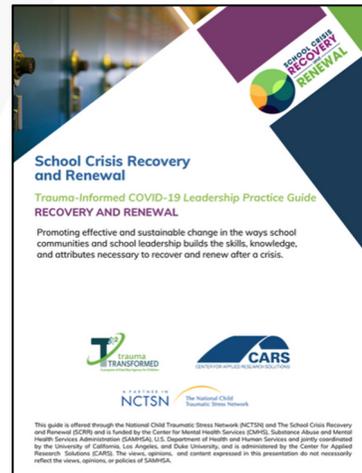
This five-part educator participatory action research experience is designed to guide educators through the process of exploring personal and collective barriers to mental health and wellness.

[Learn more and register](#)

# SCRR Resources



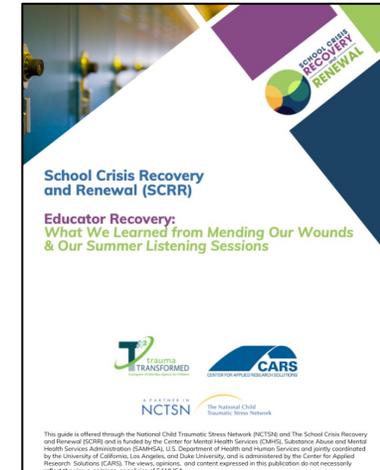
10 Pillars of School Crisis Recovery and Renewal



Trauma-Informed COVID-19 Leadership Practice Guide for Recovery and Renewal



What Helps & What Harms Students' Crises Recovery? Young Adult Reflective Listening Sessions



School Crisis Recovery & Renewal (SCRR) Educator Recovery: What We Learned from Mending Our Wounds & Our Summer Listening Sessions

# SCRR Resources

## **Memorialization and Commemoration**

<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/events-learning-opportunities/memorialization-and-commemoration-navigating-creating-and-holding-space-in-our-schools-after-loss/>

*This page hosts materials to help guide your school crisis leadership through recovery, as mourning and remembrance are a key pillar of school crisis recovery*

## **School Suicide Postvention x Recovery and Renewal: Embracing and Expanding Postvention in / for Our Schools**

<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/school-suicide-postvention-recovery-and-renewal/>

*This page hosts materials from across our events that offer resources and learning on suicide postvention + recovery and renewal.*

## **Supporting Grief Awareness**

<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/scrr-blog/>

*SCRR offers different ways and approaches to deepen our school culture's comfort with grief, grieving, and so much more. From personal stories from staff, resources we're curated, and more, we hope all of us as school crisis leaders feel more efficacious in embracing grief so that we can hold all the emotional realities and possibilities for the children and students we serve.*

**Interested in training, consulting, coaching, or intensive support for your school, community, district, county, agency etc. for issues related to recovery & renewal?** Here is some of what we can offer.

### **SCRR Trainings & Workshops by Request**

- What is School Crisis Recovery & Renewal? An Introduction
- Fostering Trauma Informed School Systems for Crisis Recovery & Renewal
- Wellness at Work: Self & Collective Care for our School & Crisis Teams
- Lived Experience x Living Experiences: Leading After Crisis Towards Integration

### **SCRR Consulting or Coaching by Request**

- Topical consulting (e.g., the difference between trauma and grief, meaning making, grief and crisis therapeutic interventions, storytelling, adapting evidence-based therapy practices for schools, pre and in-service competency and skill development, etc)
- Strengthening school implementation (e.g. how to build and sustain trauma-informed school cultures and structures during and after a school crisis, how to increase your COVID-19 related school crisis leadership skills, capacities, and actions)
- SCRR Leadership Coaching (e.g., leading grief circles in schools, relational coaching on the four trauma-informed and healing centered leadership competencies: relational leadership, trauma informed communication, mindfulness & reflection, and radical self-inquiry & critical inquiry)

Access our team and coaches network by [filling out a brief form](#) and we'll get in connection to see how we can support you.

# Opportunities from the MHTTC Network

## **MHTTC Network's Healing School Communities: Shifting the Dominant Paradigm to Center Student Wellness**

*February 8 – March 22, 2022*

This Community of Practice will be to explore the roles and responsibilities of school staff and systems in supporting a school's healing ecosystem within the context of racial violence.

[Learn more and register](#)

# Mental Health Resources

**SAMHSA Helpline** (call or text)

1-800-985-5990

**National Crisis Line** (for youth and adults)

1-800-273-8255

**LGBT National Hotline**

1-866-488-7386

**Trevor Project LGBTQ Youth Hotline**

1-888-488-4564

**Trans Lifeline Transgender Peer Support**

1-877-565-8860

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Link)**

800-273-8255 or chat with Lifeline



SCHOOL CRISIS  
**RECOVERY**  
and  
**RENEWAL**

## Contact Info

**Email:** [SCRR@cars-rp.org](mailto:SCRR@cars-rp.org)

**Phone:** (888) 597.0995

**Website:** [www.schoolcrisishealing.org](http://www.schoolcrisishealing.org)

## Get social with us!

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 **Instagram:** @scrr\_project

 **Twitter:** @scrr\_project

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