



Metabolizing Loss

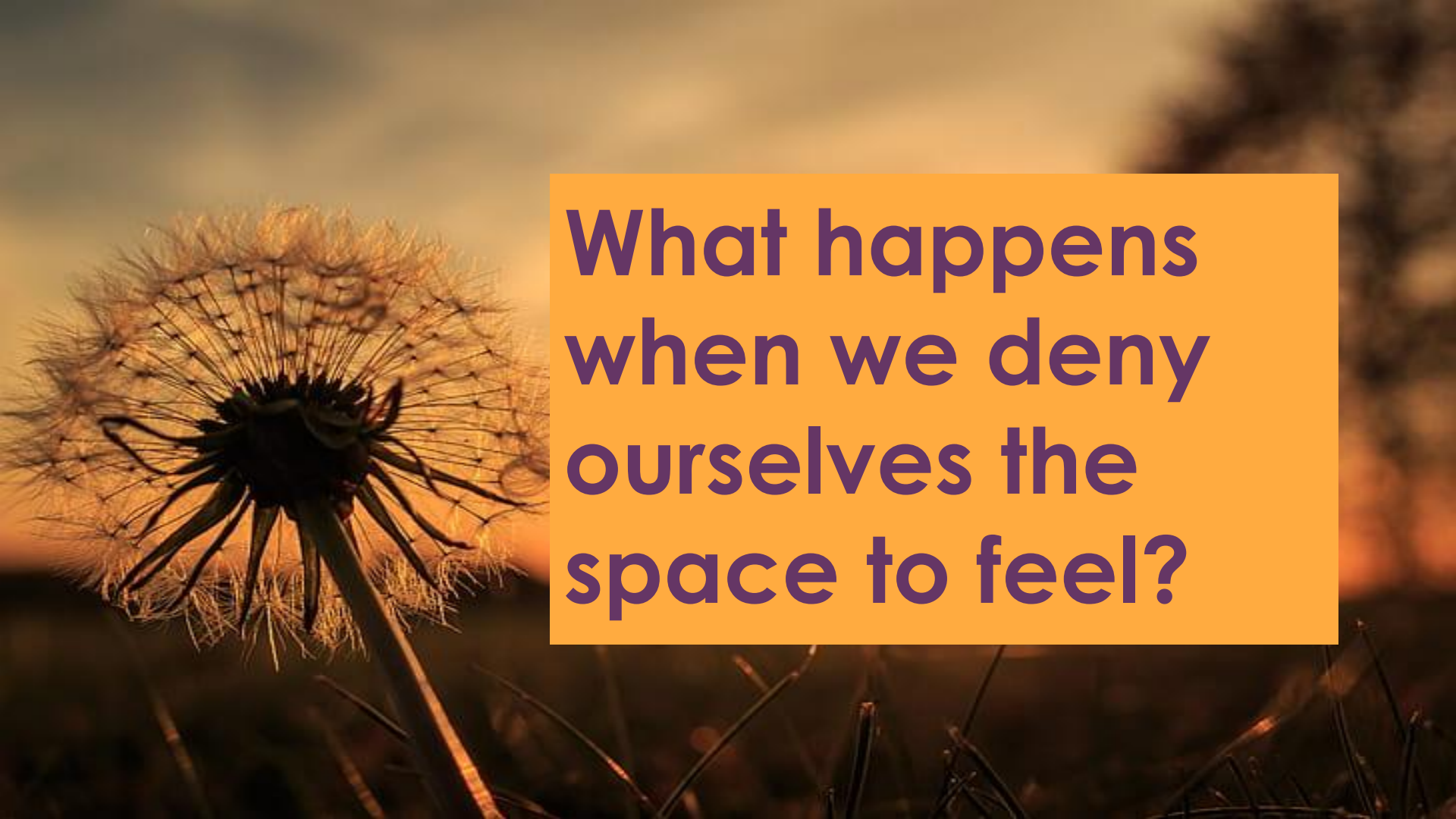
Making Room to Feel More than Grief

Strategies for Renewal



The first step in sustaining ourselves as teachers is **recognizing that professional norms regulate our grieving and emotions** surrounding loss. This step is necessary because, frankly, **teachers are not conditioned to think of their own needs**; teachers are conditioned to think of students' needs.

- Antero Garcia

A close-up photograph of a dandelion seed head, showing the intricate structure of the seeds and the dark, central core. The background is a soft, warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**What happens
when we deny
ourselves the
space to feel?**

Disenfranchised Grief:

[Grief] in which the griever does not have the opportunity or permission to move through grief.

- Dr. Kenneth Doka (1989)

“When I lost someone, there was nobody I could sit at the table and have a conversation with.

Now, I can talk and release some of those pains, and I don't have to worry about somebody being upset, because we are all releasing and holding and caring at the same time.”

- Beverly Canady, pilot participant, **Life After Loss Tables: The Educators' Edition**

Our “Life After Loss” body of work is guided by three essential questions:

- How might the experience of student death years ago impact your current practice?
- How might we make sense of school-based loss and how that informs who we are as administrators, educators, clinicians, and youth advocates?
- How might we incorporate the losses we experienced as students ourselves, now that we are educators-perhaps even in the same community in which we grew up?



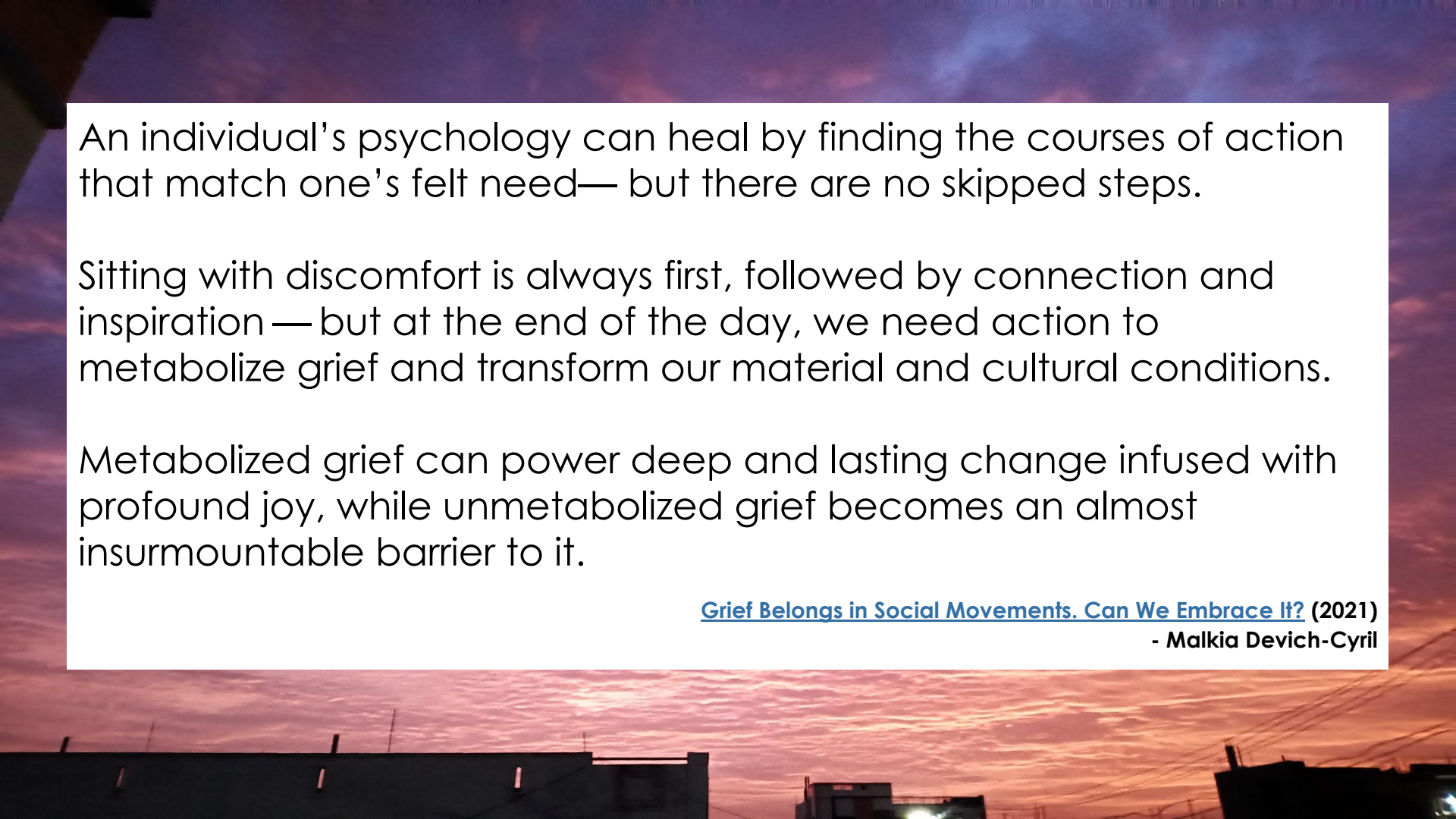
Loss, like any traumatic experience can cause or surface shrinkage or expansion, individually and within a community.

What we have seen and felt in our own experiences with student death?



Student death can . . .

- Impact our future relationship-building with new students
- Activate personal feelings of efficacy, control, and responsibility
- Cause dissociation or over-association
- Bring up our own personal experiences with past losses
- Surface different belief systems
- Lead to moral injury if unaddressed (because of stigma, adult fear)
- Surface "investment war"
- . . .



An individual's psychology can heal by finding the courses of action that match one's felt need— but there are no skipped steps.

Sitting with discomfort is always first, followed by connection and inspiration — but at the end of the day, we need action to metabolize grief and transform our material and cultural conditions.

Metabolized grief can power deep and lasting change infused with profound joy, while unmetabolized grief becomes an almost insurmountable barrier to it.

[Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?](#) (2021)

- Malkia Devich-Cyril

An individual's psychology can heal by finding the courses of action that match one's felt need— but there are no skipped steps.

Sitting with discomfort is always first, followed by connection and inspiration — but at the end of the day, we need action to metabolize grief and transform our material and cultural conditions.

Metabolized grief can power deep and lasting change infused with profound joy, while unmetabolized grief becomes an almost insurmountable barrier to it.

Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?
(2021)

- Malkia Devich-Cyril

Identify three-six words in a row that **resonate with you.**

1. **Why** might these words be standing out to you in this moment?

2. What are they making you **think, feel and wonder?**

3. What is **challenging about this** in the context of schools?

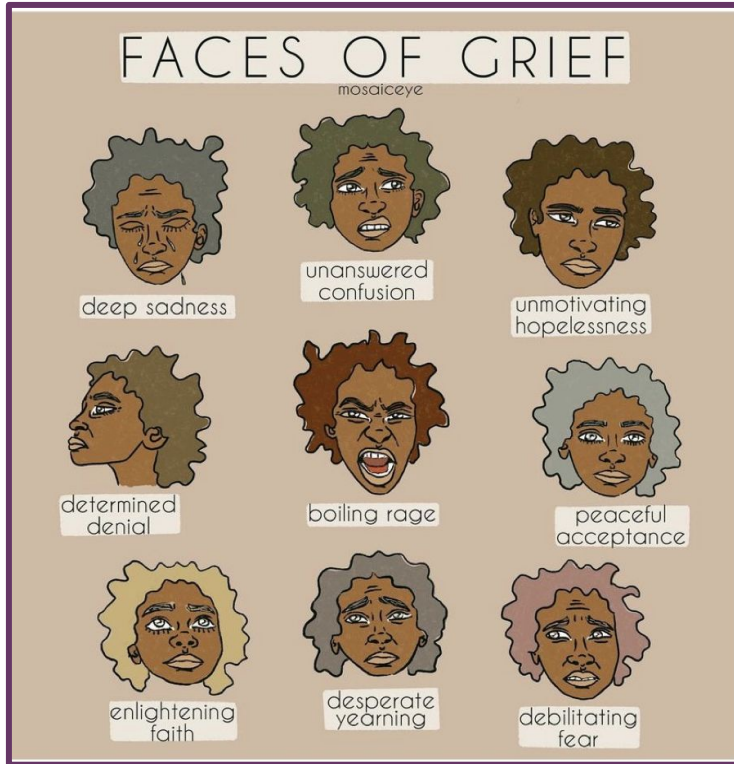
4. What might **we do about it?**



Speak the
truth, even if
your voice
shakes

The Challenges of
Metabolizing Strong Emotions
in Schools chalk talk

What Supports the Metabolization of Strong Emotions?



1. Opportunities to be witnessed fully.
2. Safe and brave spaces in which to name our feelings and experiences.
3. Mirroring, accepting and normalizing the many faces of grief without judgement.

Establishing the Safety to Grieve

TABLE 1.

Reflective Questions for Teachers

Focal Question	Additional Questions to Consider
Do I want to share my loss with colleagues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What aspects of my experiences do I feel comfortable sharing and what parts do I want to keep private?• When do I want to share?• With whom can I share this experience?
Do I want to share my loss with students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What aspects of my experiences do I feel comfortable sharing and what parts do I want to keep private?• When do I want to share?
What are some professional norms that are creating tensions for me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What compels me to share?• What compels me to hold back?• What are the sources of these pressures?

Teachers can consider how their grief will enter their teaching practices.

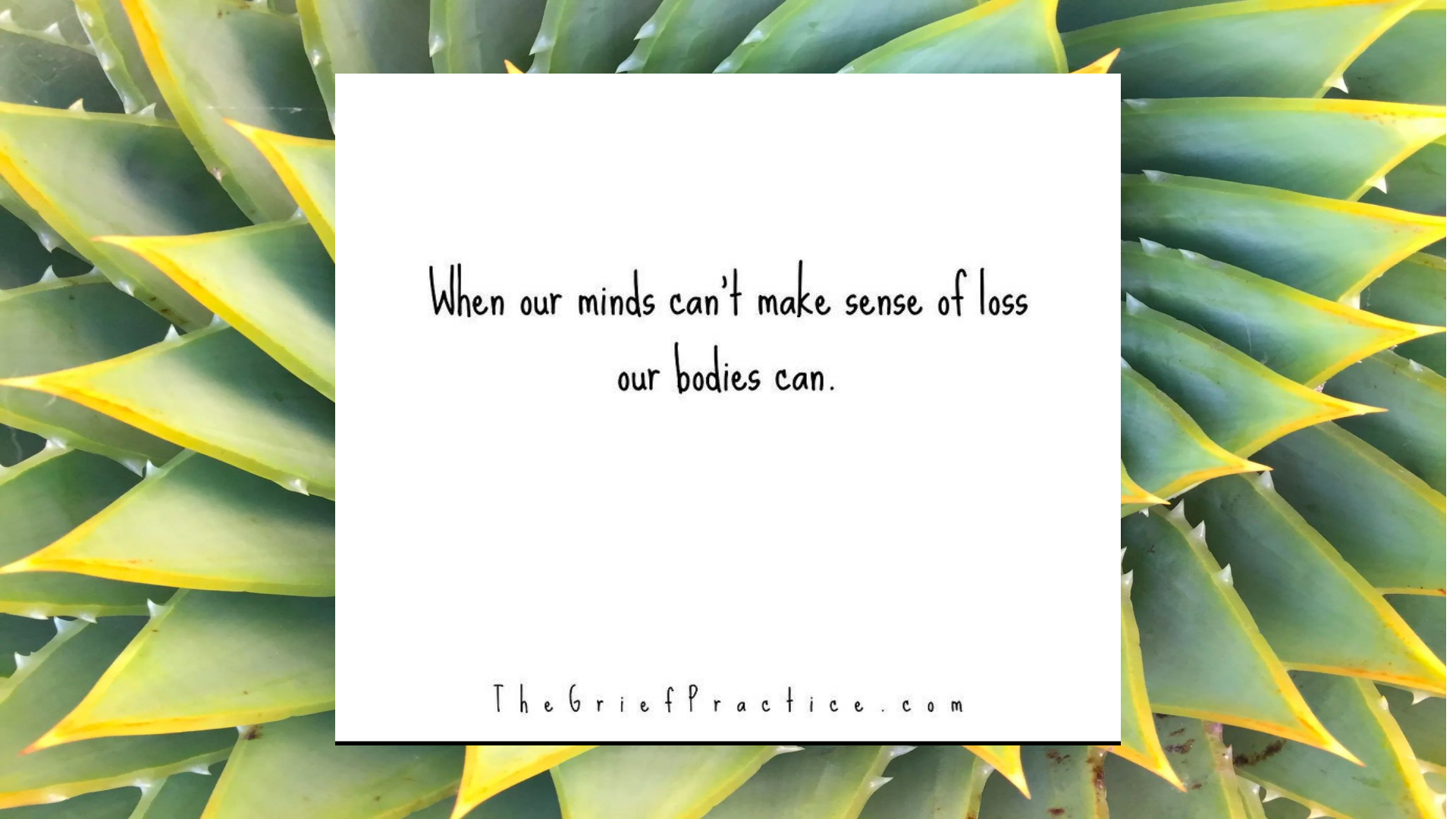
MANDIE B. DUNN AND ANTERO GARCIA

Self-attuning to our grief and strong emotions supports our ability to establish appropriate boundaries around our sharing.

Metabolizing Grief and Healing:

Holding space for ourselves and our communities comes with certain commitments

1. We educate ourselves/stay informed and aware.
2. We establish, communicate, negotiate and respect boundaries when we need to have them.
3. We are attuned to the experience of grief and lived experience and how it can make our grief response, recovery and renewal needs different.
4. What other commitments might you carry into this?

A close-up photograph of several aloe vera leaves, showing their characteristic thick, fleshy texture and serrated edges. The leaves are a vibrant green color with prominent yellow-orange edges, creating a layered, geometric pattern. The lighting is bright, highlighting the natural sheen of the plant's surface.

When our minds can't make sense of loss
our bodies can.

TheGriefPractice.com

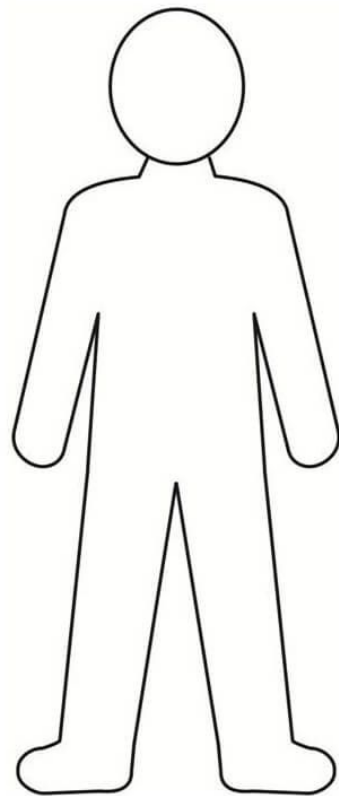
Body Scan



When our minds can't make sense of loss
our bodies can.

TheGriefPractice.com

I Have a Body

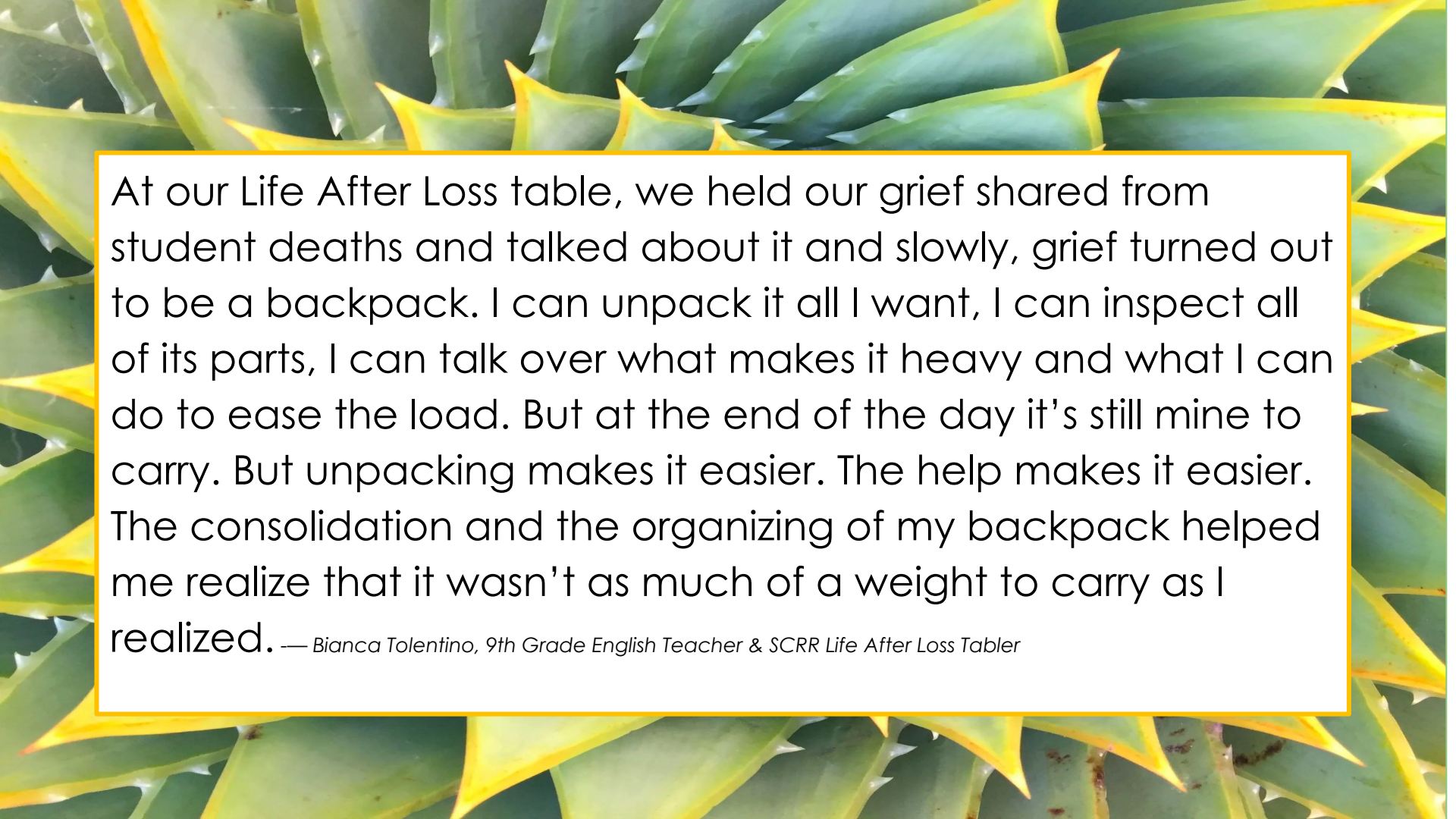


Pause and Reflect

1. Where does grief live in your body?
2. What has your grief looked like over time?
3. What has your grief taught you?
4. What has your grief needed from you?

Art by Faviana Rodriguez



A close-up photograph of several aloe vera leaves, showing their characteristic thick, fleshy texture and serrated edges. The leaves are a vibrant green color, with some showing yellowish-orange tips or edges, suggesting they might be ripe or have been exposed to sunlight. The leaves are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, filling the entire frame.

At our Life After Loss table, we held our grief shared from student deaths and talked about it and slowly, grief turned out to be a backpack. I can unpack it all I want, I can inspect all of its parts, I can talk over what makes it heavy and what I can do to ease the load. But at the end of the day it's still mine to carry. But unpacking makes it easier. The help makes it easier. The consolidation and the organizing of my backpack helped me realize that it wasn't as much of a weight to carry as I realized. — Bianca Tolentino, 9th Grade English Teacher & SCRR Life After Loss Tabler

When you imagine
what life could feel
like after
metabolizing grief,
what comes up?

Art by Faviana Rodriguez

