

The
DINNER PARTY



**Creating the Container for Us:
How to Hold Space for
Ourselves & Each Other After
Student Death**

A Special Leadership Seminar

February 29, 2024



**SCHOOL CRISIS
RECOVERY**
— and —
RENEWAL

Welcome. We're so happy to be together in this.

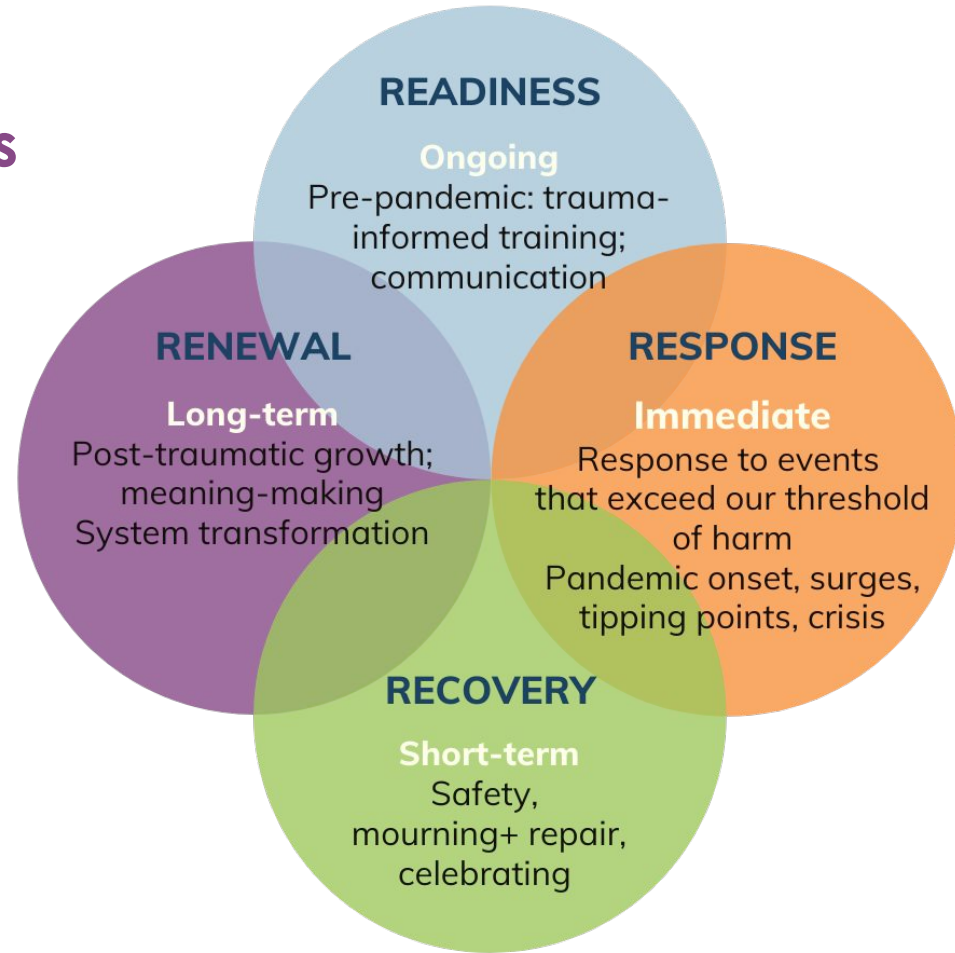


“Grief isn’t something that happens to us- it’s something we make. It’s a response. There is agency in it...Culture is a way we communicate our sorrows and our joys” - Malkia Devich-Cyril

Why are we here?

Creating the Container = Crisis Recovery & Renewal

Coming together with peers for mutuality, collaboration months or years after to make meaning of an experience or experiences helps us individually and collectively bring our bodies and minds from chaos to cohesion.



Check out our guide "[10 Pillars of Recovery and Renewal](#)" that introduces the three core practices of recovery + the seven elements of renewal.

Our essential questions for today:

- How might we build our skills and visions for how we will come together as staff after student loss?
- How might we make sense of school-based loss and how that informs who we are as administrators, educators, clinicians, and youth advocates?



Today's Flow

- Introductions // Welcome
- Our Group Agreements + Needs Scavenger Hunt
- Part 1: Starting with the self: Where am I in this work?
 - Re-enfranchising educator grief
 - “Grief bias”- exploring our identity, power and positionality
- Break (aiming for around 11:30 am PT!)
- Part 2: Engaging in collective rituals with The Dinner Party Labs
 - The power of rituals
 - Metabolizing grief together as a school team, community and culture
- Part 3: Creating the Container
 - Creating intentional spaces for educators in the days, weeks and years after
 - Vision boarding practice
- Part 4: Closing & Integration

GUIDE

Creating and Holding Space for Ourselves and Each Other After Student Death

A guide to processing, meaning-making, and integration as educators for our collective recovery and renewal

February 2023



The DINNER PARTY labs



<https://schoolcrisish healing.org/creating-and-holding-space-dinner-party/>

WORKSHEET

CREATING THE CONTAINER:

Designing Collective Rituals to Metabolize Grief Together as a School Team, Community, and Culture

WORKSHEET

Created By:

School Crisis Recovery & Renewal
and The Dinner Party Labs



The DINNER PARTY labs

<https://schoolcrisish healing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Creating-the-Container-Worksheet-SCRR-TDPL-2023.pdf>

How might we can create our own container for our learning in this space?

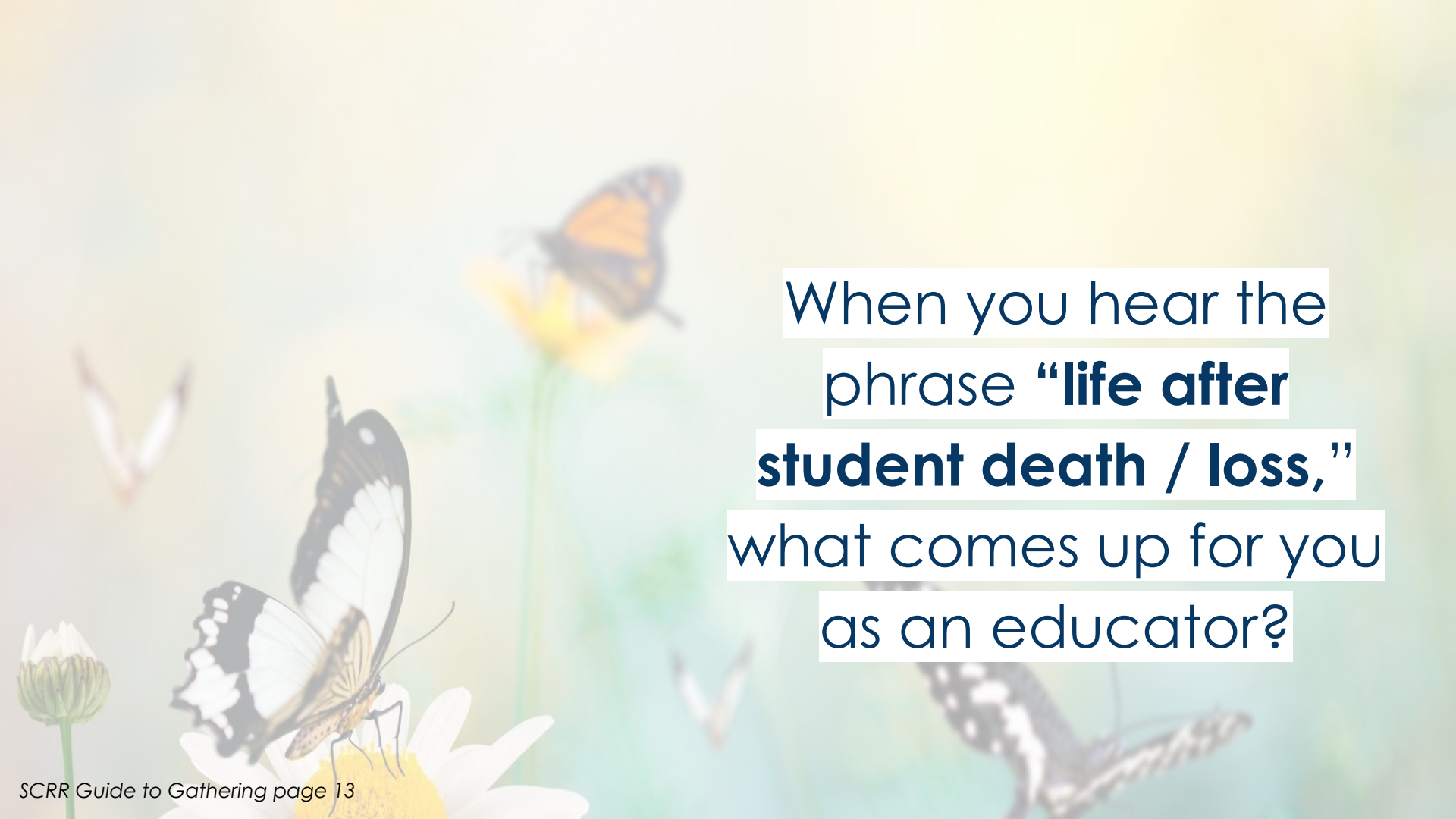
- Give and receive welcome.
- **Safety and self-preservation first.** You know yourself best. Turn the camera on or off. Do you.
- **Be present as fully as possible:** We've all got a lot going on. And this time is for us and our growth and learning.
- **Only offer what you need to:** Share only whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support.
- **No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.** Advice given only when asked for it.
- **When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.** Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, "I wonder why they feel/think this way?" or "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?"
- **Deep confidentiality:** Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.
- **Recognize that no two trauma, harm, grief or healing experiences are the same.** Let's listen to each other with care, respect and dignity.
- **Expect and accept a lack of closure.** This session will not be able to speak to everything, but it will speak to some things. Know that there is always room for more learning, listening and leading.



Needs Scavenger Hunt |

What is calling you into this special seminar?

- **Name, pronouns, location, role, how you identify**
- **What makes you feel held or brings you joy in holding space for others?**
EG: I'm Leora (she/hers), in Berkeley CA, I'm a former educator and now project director, I identify as white by race and Jewish by ethnicity and as a daughter and friend, and I feel called into this because it's meaningful for me to create space that I and others need that doesn't exist-educator grief.
- **Who are you dedicating your learning to today?**
- **What is a hope for your learning in this space?**



When you hear the
phrase **“life after
student death / loss,”**
what comes up for you
as an educator?

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"
- . . .

Starting with the self: Where am I in this work?

Part 1



Nelba Márquez-Greene, L...
@Nelba_MG

It feels like we're all playing scrabble, we stuck our hands in the tile bag and somehow everyone's tiles spell the same word.

Grief.

3:15 PM · 5/23/22 · Twitter for iPhone

Creating the Container = Re-enfranchising our educator grief

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

— Dr. Kenneth Doka

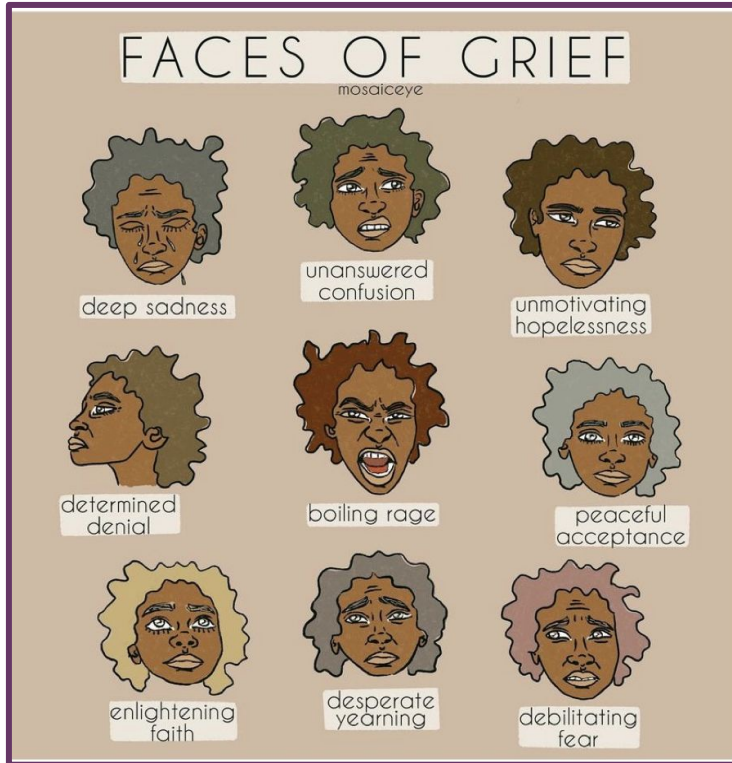
“When I lost someone, there was nobody I could sit at the table and have a conversation with.

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*

What happens when we deny ourselves the space to feel?

What Supports the Metabolization of Strong Emotions?



- We create opportunities to be witnessed fully.
- We **educate** ourselves/stay informed and aware.
- We establish, communicate, negotiate and respect boundaries when we need to have them.
- We are attuned to the experience of grief and lived experience and how it can make our grief response, recovery and renewal needs different.

Metabolizing Grief and Healing:

Holding space for ourselves and our communities comes with certain commitments

- We educate ourselves/stay informed and aware.
- We establish, communicate, negotiate and respect boundaries when we need to have them.
- We are attuned to the experience of grief and lived experience and how it can make our grief response, recovery and renewal needs different.

“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

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.

From: Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?
- 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 about creating a container after student death?**

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

Unpacking our “grief bias” (yes, it’s a new term we came up with.)

**Identity, Power, Positionality &
Creating the Container**

Individual JOURNAL REFLECTION

When imagining holding space for educators, what kinds of grief might...

Irritate you?

Upset you?

Surprise you?

Move you?

What ways of colleague mourning might align with your own ways of mourning? What cultural rituals or ways might collide?

What types of student death might you be more prepared to hold, and what types might you need to sit with more?

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



Adapted from ccrweb.ca

@sylvriaduckworth

TYPES OF PRIVILEGE IN OUR SOCIETY

(Which are yours?)
 More power ←————→ Less power

1. Light ←———— SKIN COLOUR —————→ Dark
2. Cisgender* man ↔ woman ↔ GENDER —————→ Gender queer
3. Family wealth ←———— SOCIO-ECONOMIC —————→ Poverty
4. Post secondary ←———— FORMAL EDUCATION —————→ Low level completion
5. Citizenship ←———— DOCUMENTED STATUS —————→ Undocumented immigrant
6. Non-disabled ←———— PHYSICAL ABILITY —————→ Disabled
7. Neurotypical ←———— NEURODIVERSITY ▲ —————→ Neurodivergent
8. Heterosexual ←———— SEXUAL ORIENTATION —————→ Queer
9. Normative ←———— PHYSICAL APPEARANCE —————→ Non-normative
10. Robust ←———— MENTAL HEALTH —————→ Vulnerable
11. Christian ←———— RELIGION —————→ Non-Christian

* Gender corresponds with birth sex ▲ Developmental, intellectual & cognitive abilities

@sylvriaduckworth

Back to our structural witnessing partners to discuss:

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BREAK – LUNCH!



jennifer "Coppertop" 🌿

@jlynn43xo

Why are there pop tarts but no
mom tarts

Because of the pastryarchy

10:25 PM · 7/1/22 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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



Engaging in collective rituals:

Metabolizing grief together as a school team, community and culture

Part 2



The DINNER PARTY labs



Why rituals

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out.

But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.”

- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*

The Science

Demarcating certain practices as rituals adds to their potency: *"The separation of ritual from other ordinary, more mundane behaviors affords it a special status. This unique quality of ritual means that the behaviors performed are inherently more valuable than other behaviors."* ⁽¹⁾

- (1) Hobson, N., Schroeder, J., Risen, J., Xygalatas, D., and Inzlicht, M. "The Psychology of Rituals: An Integrative Review and Process-Based Framework." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 22, issue 3, 2018: 260-284.

Why engaging in rituals collectively matters

Practicing rituals shaped people's experiences in profound ways.

The experience of using the Ritual Collection:

1. positively affected participants' **sense of well-being**;
2. empowered participants with a sense of **emotional agency**;
3. prompted participants to **express greater depths of emotion**;
4. amplified the impact of participants' **collective identity** and **sense of belonging** within their small group;
5. **deepened participants' relationships** with one another;
6. helped participants feel **connected with the person they lost**;
7. helped many participants feel a sense of **connection to something bigger**;
8. catalyzed participants to think about and investigate the **role of rituals in their lives** more broadly;
9. led participants to **apply insights** they gained through their experience to their daily lives.

“Doing the rituals was more meaningful because it was with the group. I’ve journaled a lot on my own, but this was special. The way people phrased things helped me think differently, and I realized that was the case for me, but I hadn’t realized it.”

What do we mean by “ritual”?

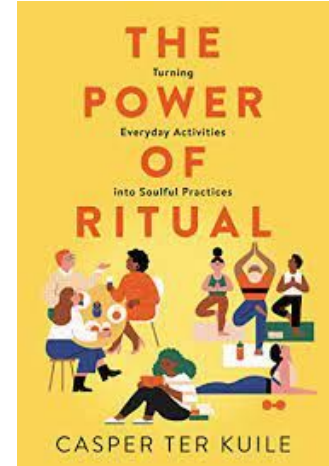
- "Rituals are purposeful behaviors designed to achieve some desired outcome."

- Michael Norton & Francesca Gino ⁽¹⁾

- "Rituals, in my view, are patterned, repeated ways in which we enact the moral emotions — of compassion, gratitude, awe, bliss, empathy, ecstasy — that have been shaped by our evolution and built up into the fabric of our culture through cultural evolution."

- Dacher Keltner, University of California-Berkeley ⁽²⁾

- According to activist & minister Kathleen McTigue, rituals are practices defined by: 1. **Intention**, 2. **Attention**, and 3. **Repetition** ⁽³⁾



(1) Michael Norton & Francesca Gino, (2014). Rituals alleviate grieving for loved ones, lovers and lotteries. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(1), 266-272.)

(2) Ter Kuile, Casper. *The Power of Ritual*. New York, HarperOne, 2020, p. Xi

(3) *ibid.*

How

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS AS A SCHOOL CULTURE AND COMMUNITY.

- Where do you go and what do you do to find meaning, as an educator and as a school community?
- Consider the different gifts that you, your colleagues, and your students bring. How do those strengths inform the way you show up for one another?

Share in chat: What rituals do you already practice as a school community? What are the practices you already engage in with intention, attention, and repetition?

"If something bigger was bubbling up for a lot of people, we could call a special circle called 'Making Meaning, where we would gather and really dig into something with the kind of a structure we all knew how to pick up."

It takes the ability to define crises away from just the people with certain job titles and it puts that with everybody."

- Alex Shevrin Venet

Step 2: Get clear on your why.

- Who and what do you wish to honor?
- What are the feelings you wish to make space for, personally and as a school community?
- What do you want to feel coming out of the experience? What do you want other people to feel?

Step 3: With whom?

- Whom are you longing to connect with, and why?
- What are the conversations you long to have, and with whom can you have them?
- Whose voices do you want to enlist as co-leaders in the design process?
- How might you partner with students, alumni, and/or families in the design and delivery of this ritual space?

“How [do] I best leverage my role to ensure that I follow what the students, his best friends, his mother, his cousin who was there, need?”

- Dr. Christina "V" Villarreal

Open vs. Affinity Space

Ask yourself:

- + Why are these the people I want to be in conversation with?
- + With whom can I/we feel emotionally safe? How can we safeguard confidentiality?
- + What might be possible for this particular group of people that might not be possible for a different group of people?

A few things to consider as you think about you who want gather:

- + Race / ethnicity
- + Power / positionality
- + Shared experience
- + Shared person

Step 3: Determine when + where

- Is there a particular date you wish to mark (for ex, an anniversary or a birthday), or a season that would feel particularly meaningful (for ex, Fall and the return to school, a holiday, the New Year, or Spring and a season of rebirth)?
- Is this something you imagine doing one-time, or a practice you hope to return to year-after-year?

"How can we create or adapt language and space for conversations to continue long-term, to help kids understand that healing, grieving, and memorializing someone in their lives is a long-term process and a lifelong process?"

- shea martin

Step 4: What's the kind of experience you wish to create?

Who are we? Think about the existing rituals that shape and define who you are as a school community: What are some familiar practices you can draw upon? What are practices you've longed to try?

Who were they? What lessons or wisdom did they leave behind? What were their beliefs or behaviors or quirks that you most admired or find yourself missing?

Anchoring in tradition: How might you honor the ancestral practices and cultural traditions present within your school community? What might you do to elevate cross-cultural practices, and to ensure participants are able to feel fully seen for the richness and diversity of belief they collectively possess?

Let your imagination run wild, and answer this question: ***"I fantasize about healing or moving forward through . . ."***

Step 5: Co-design your container

- Read through your answers above, and circle 3-8 words that you think would help create the experience you're craving.
- As a group, share the words you circled, and identify and discuss points of intersection and divergence.
- Have each person respond to the following:
 - In honor of:
 - We wish to:
 - At (when/where):
 - With the intention of:
 - Regardless of how it goes, I'll take care of myself by:

Step 5: Co-design your container

How will we support participants (fellow educators, administrators, former educators, community based partners, students, alumni, staff, faculty, etc) in feeling seen and heard in their grief journey?

What will we...

Do?

Say?

Create?

Tips

Name the harm.

Naming & acknowledging "vertical forms of violence" allows us to ask: **"How we might create spaces of safety and of healing in a school system and institution that has been historically unsafe for students [of color]?"**

...

"Center the voices on the margins that are living and grappling with grief and trauma and death every single day."

- shea martin

Make it a meal



“And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it. And all from my cup of tea.”

- Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*

Continue sharing stories, as new generations of students and educators come and go.

"We've used professional development and story-sharing to really center the folks that we've lost, and to make sure that when people are coming in, they know their names.

We talk about who they were in the school, and our failures to meet their needs.

We name them as readers and as scholars — as people who brought great joy, and that leaves aside the cause of their death."

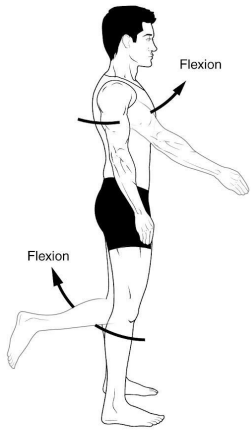
- Beth "Silb" Silbergeld

Chat waterfall

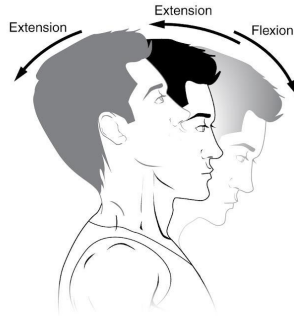
(invitation to complete the below sentences in the chat)

In my wildest dreams, the containers to process student death will support

- My healing by...
- My school communities healing by...

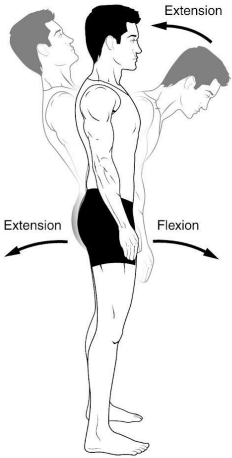


(a) and (b) Angular movements: flexion and extension at the shoulder and knees

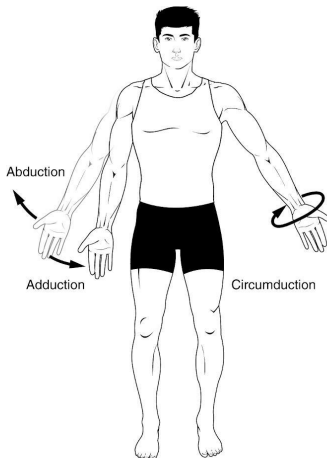


(c) Angular movements: flexion and extension of the neck

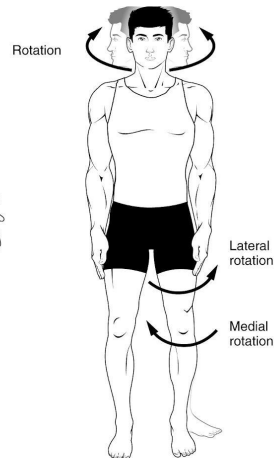
STRETCH BREAK



(d) Angular movements: flexion and extension of the vertebral column



(e) Angular movements: abduction, adduction, and circumduction of the upper limb at the shoulder



(f) Rotation of the head, neck, and lower limb

Part 3: Creating the Container

Creating intentional spaces in the days, weeks and years after



“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, *"On Backpacks and Baggage: Life After Educator Loss Reflections from A First Year Teacher"*

<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/on-backpacks-and-baggage-life-after-educator-loss-reflections-from-a-first-year-teacher/>

Being the Container: What is Our Responsibility to Ourselves and Our Community?

What existing skills or practices do we have that inspired us to show up today?

How are we already caring for community in a way that'll allow you to show up and hold this space well?

What might we need to keep at the forefront?

- Educate ourselves - stay informed and aware
- Create, expect, respect, and hold boundaries
- Be attentive to everyone's lived experience
- Be attuned to our lived experience

Vision boarding our dreams for containers, rituals, and spaces held:

Honoring Nex Benedict and students with
shared stories



Nex was a nonbinary 16-year-old high school sophomore in Oklahoma whose death has captured attention around the world.

Nex, who used He/Him/They/Them pronouns, was a straight-A student who loved reading, drawing, Minecraft, and their cat, Zeus (source: [How To Talk To Kids About The Death Of Nex Benedict | YourTango](#))

Our invitation:

- Using the [Creating the Container worksheet](#) (focusing on page 5), take some time to design how you would want to create or have created a container to process Nex's death in your community (school, org, agency).
- Find a slide in our Google Presentation Slides and source words, images... a vision board for what you want to hold and how.
- And as always, you have choice! You can choose to vision board another way to create your container if this invitation doesn't feel accessible right now).

*Rest in Power,
Nex Benedict*



Vision Board Share Out

Closing

Part 4



What I **received**/What I **learned**...

What I **valued** in this space...

What I'm still **wondering**...

**THANK YOU +
NEXT STEPS**



Please share your feedback with us

Help us continue to offer recovery and renewal programming at no-cost by sharing your feedback with us (truly- every evaluation = support for SCRR to continue).

We invite you to share your experience from today's learning:

https://bit.ly/SCRR_CCFeb29_Eval



Helpful Resources from this Seminar



[Ritualizing Remembrance in our School Cultures: Día de los muertos](#) (SCRR, 2021)

[Creating and Holding Space for Ourselves and Each Other After Student Death](#) (SCRR, 2023)

[On Backpacks and Baggage: Life After Educator Loss – Reflections from A First Year Teacher](#) (SCRR Blog, 2022)

[Our Right to Grieve: Grief-Informed Recommendations and Resources for Healing-Centered & Racially-Just School Cultures](#) (SCRR, 2023)

Educator Voices of Experience: Memorialization & Commemoration

- [Excerpts from Memorialization & Commemoration Part 1: Discourse](#)
- Video of the discussion (May, 2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQrQurs15jE>

Continuing Education



We are able to offer 4 Continuing Education Hours for attending today's Creating the Container for Us session. To register for CE Hours go to:

<https://conta.cc/3HSDzYZ>

If you do not need Continuing Education but would like a Certificate of Attendance to demonstrate the time you participated in this session, email Niki Magtoto at

scrr@cars-rp.org

Upcoming SCRR Learning Opportunities



A Moment of Pause: Time to Cultivate Trauma Informed Communication

March 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2024

<https://bit.ly/SCRR AMP2324>

Trauma Informed School Systems for Crisis Recovery and Renewal

March 6, 2024

<https://bit.ly/SCRR TISS Spring24>

Self-Attuning: Tending to Emotional Activation - Healing our Own Wounds while Providing Care to Others

March 14, 21 and 28 April 4, 11 and 18, 2024

<https://bit.ly/SCRR SASpring24>

SCRR's Spring 2024 Network of Practice - A Spring Festival of Learning: The 2023-2024 SCRR Leadership Fellows' Capstone Project Symposium

April 25, 2024

<https://bit.ly/SCRR SpringNoP24>

Life After Loss: Honoring Nex Benedict and Connected Students *A Process Space for Educators*

MARCH 7, 2024

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm PT • 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm CT • 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm ET

https://bit.ly/SCRR_LALNex



“We mourn so we can love.

We grieve so we can replenish
the soil that will sprout deeper
connections.

More clear relationships.

And caring bonds unburdened
by bitterness and rooted in fuller
presence.”

-Chiara Francesca Galimberti



SCHOOL CRISIS
RECOVERY
and
RENEWAL



Contact Info

Email: SCRR@cars-rp.org

Phone: (888) 597.0995

Website: www.schoolcrisishealing.org

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SAMHSA's Mission



SAMHSA's mission is to reduce
the impact of substance abuse and
mental illness on America's communities.

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