



Supporting healthy ways of living through grief & loss

A guide for First Nations Peoples



This document was prepared by the Canadian Virtual Hospice. It is intended to provide general information only. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information. The contents do not constitute medical advice and should not be relied upon as such. If you have questions about your health or medical issues, speak with a healthcare provider.

Production of this resource has been made possible through collaboration and financial support from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Corporation and Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada or the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.

The butterfly on the cover features colors to celebrate, honour, and welcome our Two-Spirit/ Indigenous LGBTQI+ people on their paths toward healing and wellness.

Aussi disponible en français :

LivingMyCulture.ca

Please share your feedback on this guide by scanning/clicking the QR code. The purpose of the short survey is to learn from your experience engaging with the Canadian Virtual Hospice Indigenous Voices project. Your feedback will help us strengthen future resource development. Findings will be summarized in aggregate form and may also be used to support future funding applications for Indigenous-led initiatives hosted by Canadian Virtual Hospice. We are committed to using this information respectfully and in ways that reflect the collective experiences shared with us. The survey is anonymous, which means we will not know who has participated.

Supporting healthy ways of living through grief & loss: A guide for First Nations Peoples

<https://questionnaire.simplesurvey.com/f/r/-GriefGuides-FirstNations>





Acknowledgements

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The main goal of this project is to develop Indigenous-led and culturally informed resources and education on grief. It builds on earlier work by CVH in two projects: *Indigenous voices: Stories of serious illness and loss I* and *II*, funded by CPAC from 2016 to 2022.

We gratefully acknowledge Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, whose Indigenous Wellness Framework has informed and shaped the development of this guide. With permission, elements of this model have been integrated throughout the document. We recognize and appreciate Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's leadership and contributions to advancing this work.

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The Canadian Virtual Hospice thanks everyone who gave their time, knowledge, and effort to develop this guide. We acknowledge the guidance from the members of the Elders and Knowledge Carriers Circle (EKCC). Their insights were key to creating this resource. We also thank the First Nations contributors who helped create this resource.





Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	1
Basic teachings of this guide	1
How to use this guide	2
Support services and counselling resources	3
Spiritual wellness creates hope: An invitation to begin healing	5
Plant medicine guide: Tobacco	6
Taking the first step toward healing: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities	7
Indigenous voices: Exploring our loss	7
Connecting with Mother Earth: Grounding ceremony	8
Connecting with Mother Earth: Reflection activity	9
Tobacco Ceremony	10
Creating your own grief support plan	12
Personal reflection activity	15
Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages	16
Emotional wellness creates belonging: Understanding your grief	17
Plant medicine guide: Sage	18
Understanding grief	19
Types of grief	20
Colonization and grief	22
Understanding loss and your journey forward:	
Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities	23
Guided reflection: Understanding grief	23
Thinking about loss: Reflection activity	25
Recognizing my grief activity	26
Body mapping activity	28
Community supports build cultural revitalization: Reflection activity	29
Indigenous voices: Reclaiming our ceremonies for grieving	30
Conversations in grief: Reflection activity	31
Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages	34



Mental wellness creates meaning: Going on your healing journey	35
Plant medicine guide: Sweetgrass	36
Taking care and building our bundles: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities	37
Healing activity: Writing affirmations	38
Healing activity: Sacred fires	42
Healing activity: Water is life	44
Healing ceremony: Purification through smudging	46
Healing activity: Sweetgrass teachings	48
Healing activity: Brushing ceremony	49
Healing activity: Cedar tea and teachings	50
Healing activity: Emotional release	51
Healing activity: Jingle dance	54
Healing activity: Music as medicine	55
Healing activity: Crafting and the Spirit Bead	57
Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages	58
Physical wellness creates purpose: Following up with support	59
Plant medicine guide: Cedar	60
Where do we go from here? Moving forward with grief: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities	61
Honouring First Nations languages in grief: My words, my connection	61
Knowledge circle activity	64
Traditional Knowledge: Strong roots, budding branches activity	67
Active decolonization and wellness activity	69
Reflection activity: Memories as medicine	72
Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages	75
Conclusion: Carrying our bundles home	77
Appendix: Grief and loss support for First Nations Peoples	79
References	83





Introduction

Boozhoo, she:kon, tansi, oki, gwe'

Thank you for engaging with *Supporting healthy ways of living through grief & loss: A guide for First Nations Peoples*. This guide helps you explore teachings and wellness activities. It offers meaningful and gentle ways to deal with grief.

Recognizing and reflecting on our grief can be a powerful yet challenging experience. It is vital to be kind and gentle with yourself as you walk this path.

Choosing to begin this work is a brave and healing act, especially when facing painful emotions. Allow these teachings and activities to support you as you go on your journey.

Basic teachings of this guide

This guide is based on Indigenous Knowledges grounded in the Indigenous Wellness Framework¹ which was developed by Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, a division of the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation Inc., is a leading culturally centred voice advocating for collaborative, integrated, and wholistic approaches to healing and wellness. This framework shows health and wellness are a balance between your Spirit, heart, mind, and body. All of this is grounded in connection to culture.

The guide highlights how we can reawaken and reconnect with our Spirit. Spirit is central to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

In your journey, feel free to use any healing practices that support your spiritual healing. These practices may be grounded in Indigenous spirituality or any belief system. You may choose to combine these belief systems and adapt them to meet your needs.

Trust your Spirit will guide you to the practices that are right for your journey.

To help you picture this journey, the guide reflects the changing seasons. Just as the seasons change, grief is also a natural part of life that transforms. We cannot control either the seasons or grief. Instead, we must acknowledge, honour, and witness them.

¹ Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2015).



How to use this guide

This guide was created to support you as you grow and heal. It has four sections based on the Indigenous Wellness Framework:

1. Spiritual wellness creates hope: An invitation to begin healing
2. Emotional wellness creates belonging: Understanding your grief
3. Mental wellness creates meaning: Going on your healing journey, and
4. Physical wellness creates purpose: Following up with support.

Each section begins with an affirmation and one of the four sacred medicines to help you connect with culture. It offers ceremonies, prayers, and activities you may want to use to help your journey through grief.

This guide has links to websites and videos. But it contains enough information for those without Internet access to use it fully.

The guide is made to be flexible. You can pick it up and put it down as you need. There is no single 'right' way to work through it. You can move at your own pace. Some sections may feel easier than others, and that is okay. Some may hold deeper meaning for you than for others. There may be sections that do not resonate with you at all.

Your experience with this guide will be as unique as your own grief and healing journey. Trust in yourself that it is the right way for you.



Support services and counselling resources

2 Spirited

Interligne

Provides 24-hour helpline and information service to LGBTQ+ people, their loved ones, and professionals from various backgrounds.

1-888-505-1010

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

Service languages: Ojibway, Cree, Inuktitut, English, French

Provides 24/7 culturally grounded assessment, referrals, support in times of crisis, and suicide intervention.

1-855-242-3310

MMIW Crisis Line

Service languages: English, French

Provides 24/7 support to those who are being impacted by the loss of a missing or murdered Indigenous woman, girl, or Two-Spirit person.

1-844-413-6649

NWAC Elder Support Line | Canada-Wide

Available Monday–Friday 9:00–11:00 a.m. EST & 1:00–3:00 p.m. EST

Call 888-664-7808

Talk 4 Healing

Service languages: Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree, English, French

Provides 24/7 culturally sensitive counselling and support to Indigenous women.

1-855-554-4325

Online service at www.Talk4Healing.com

The Indian Residential School Survivors Society

1-800-721-0066

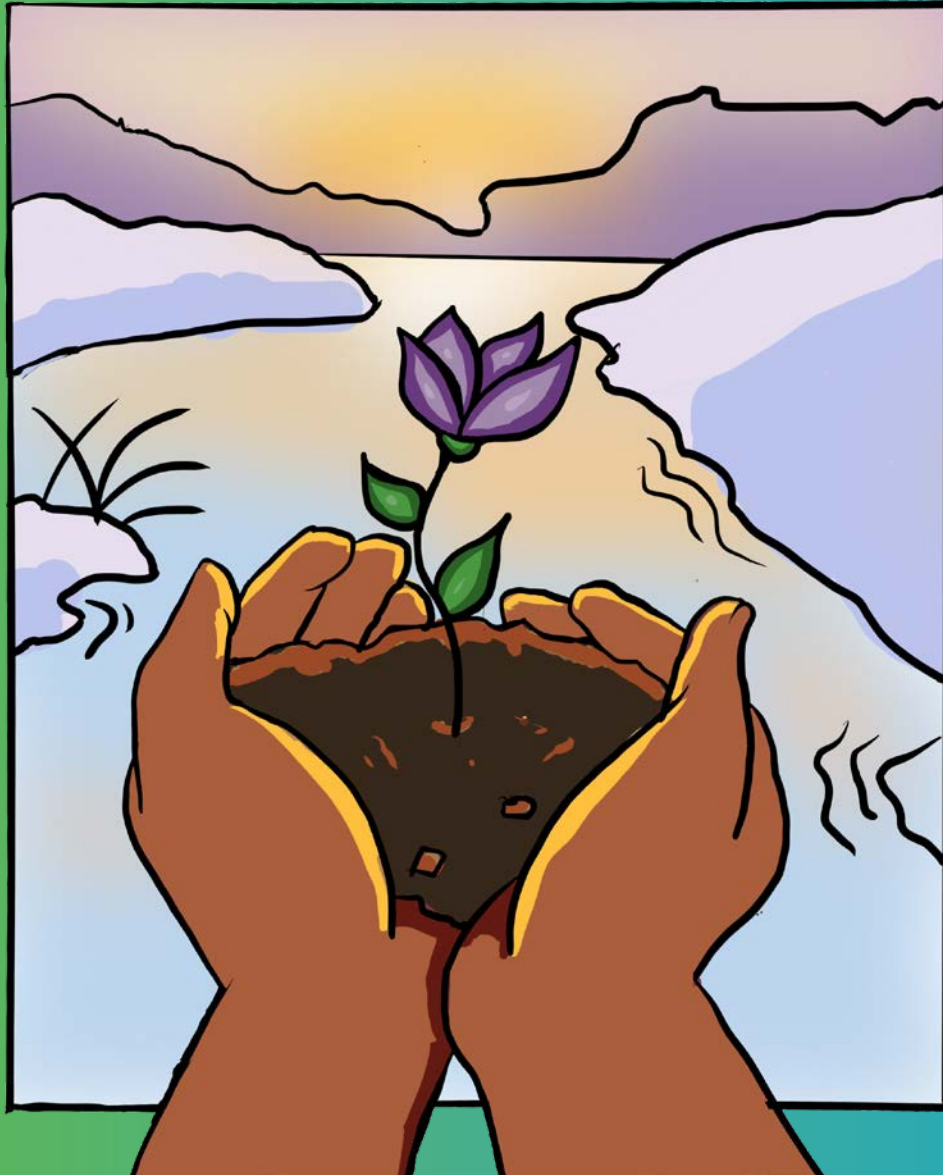
The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Residential School 24-Hour Crisis Line

1-866-925-4419





Spiritual wellness creates hope: An invitation to begin healing



Hope is reflected in the changing of the seasons. As the earth begins to thaw in spring, small signs of new life appear. Just as the first plants that break through the soil, hope can also emerge from your grief.



Hope lives in our Spirit, in the belief that healing is possible. It brings comfort by reminding us we are never alone. Our ancestors, all beings within the world, and those future generations walk with us on our journey. We find hope in our dreams, ceremonies, and prayers. We also find it by spending time on the Land, or through connection and creativity. Each of these allows us to create or release something meaningful.

Even when grief feels heavy, hope can offer us a spark of light and love. It reminds us we are still here and can embrace Creator's blessings.

“*Because that Spirit
has never ceased to be;
your Spirit has been eternal
and always will be.*”

Betty McKenna,
member of the EKCC

AFFIRMATION

**My Spirit carries the wisdom of the
generations before me.**

We encourage you to reflect on this affirmation in this section of the guide. When your healing journey is complicated or stressful, say this affirmation. It can bring hope during a hard time.

Plant medicine guide: Tobacco

Tobacco is often used to connect with the Spirit world. In grief, tobacco helps us speak our sorrow aloud, whether through prayer or offerings. It honours our ancestors and kin who have passed. It also helps us express our emotions with humility and reverence.

We encourage you to reflect on this sacred medicine and consider ways you can bring it into your healing journey.





Taking the first step toward healing: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities

Accepting this invitation to begin your healing journey is an act of courage that reveals hope. To move forward in healing, it is key to know what you are working toward and why.

When you accessed this guide, you showed that you see that changes need to be made. Seeking support is a big step to take.

In this section, we want to support you in marking this sacred moment through ceremonies and activities. Consider using one or more of the following ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities to help you celebrate this first step.

Indigenous voices: Exploring our loss

Grief is a unique experience for each individual and for each loss. Everyone experiences loss differently. Listening to others and learning from their journeys can help us navigate our own grief. Looking to Elders and Knowledge Carriers for support can help you feel connected and rooted in ancestral knowledge on your journey.

“Indigenous Voices: Exploring Our Loss” shares the views and stories of Elders and Knowledge Carriers from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nations. Click or scan the QR code to the right to watch. After watching, you are encouraged to reflect on the following questions:



1. What did the Elders and Knowledge Carriers share that stood out to you? Why do you think it impacted you?
2. How does grief impact your body, mind, heart, and Spirit? What have the Elders and Knowledge Carriers in the video shared to help you?
3. How can Land, culture, community, and Traditional Knowledge support healing?
4. What is one lesson from the Elders and Knowledge Carriers you will take with you on your grieving journey?
5. What responsibility do we have to carry these teachings forward in a good way, for ourselves and for future generations?



Connecting with Mother Earth: Grounding ceremony

Before you begin this journey, take a moment to connect with Mother Earth and the Sky World (Father Sky). Mother Earth personifies everything related to the Land. Father Sky personifies all the celestials: the sun, stars, rain. Our relatives who have passed on are the Sky People. When we go back home, we return to the Sky. Remember that when you spend time on the Land and respect Mother Earth, she will respect you.

Time spent on the Land offers space for reflection, clarity, and grounding. It reminds us healing moves through phases, like the seasons. It teaches us patience, presence, and how to walk gently with ourselves and with all our relations.

So, as you begin this journey, consider spending time on the Land. Let the Land help you remember who you are, where you come from, and what you are walking toward.

To prepare, take the time to ground yourself in your physical space so your heart, mind, and body are ready to move forward. You may want to go outside and sit with your feet flat and firm on the ground. Grounding yourself connects you with Mother Earth.

Look around and take a mindful moment to find:



Reflect on these things to clear your mind and ground yourself for the work you are about to start.



Connecting with Mother Earth: Reflection activity

There is no right or wrong way to spend time on the Land. Spending time on the Land in your own way is a meaningful way to connect with yourself and all of Creation.

Think about how you can add time on the Land into your everyday life.

Draw a line from each idea to one of the circles that show: I have tried this, I want to try this, I do not want to try this, or I do not know if I want to try this.



Everything you need in this journey to get you through your life is out your front door, just walk out your front door. And I thought, that's amazing. Because that's what I felt like when I was fasting on the Land. That first time I went fasting, I felt I wasn't alone. I knew that I had helpers there and that it was okay to cry and let all those things go."

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver,
member of the EKCC



Taking breaks outside



Harvesting food or traditional plant medicines



Attending a purification (Sweat) Lodge



Trying a grounding activity



Going on a walk in nature



Listening to waves or moving water



Spending time hunting or fishing



Saying a message of gratitude (such as the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address)



Opening a window



Taking a walk barefoot or in moccasins



Caring for a plant (indoors or outdoors)



I have tried this



I want to try this



I do not want to try this



I do not know if I want to try this?



Tobacco Ceremony

Tobacco is a sacred medicine, used by many First Nations for healing practices. It is used in various ceremonies when asking for help or to show gratitude.

‘Ceremonial’ or ‘whole leaf’ tobacco is tobacco that does not have added chemicals or ingredients. People often gift it. You can also find it in stores that sell Indigenous ceremony supplies. Ceremonial tobacco is not always available and can be replaced with any loose tobacco or even a cigarette. The type of tobacco does not matter because the prayers and intentions that each tobacco tie holds are what make them sacred. The core of this practice is the care you put into it.

As part of your healing journey, you may want to use tobacco to connect with your culture and the Spirit world. It can be used to ask for help when things are hard, or to express gratitude for another day and the chance to move through your grief. You can do this by carrying tobacco with you or placing it in your favourite spot outdoors. Your chosen space could be a special place where you go to think, such as by the water or a sacred fire.

You can also create a tobacco offering in the form of a tobacco tie. This is a small cloth bundle containing tobacco. Many First Nations Peoples use it as a respectful offering. It helps them connect with the spiritual world. The tobacco tie is a symbol of respect, used to connect with the Creator and Mother Earth.

The next section outlines the steps and materials required to create a tobacco tie.





Steps to make a tobacco tie

Before you create a tobacco tie, think about how you can use tobacco to connect your heart, mind, and body and the purpose of making the tie. Spend some time thinking about these questions:

- ✓ What thoughts, feelings, and emotions are you putting into your tie?
- ✓ What is your purpose and intention in making your tie?

After you name a purpose, it is time to put your tobacco tie together. Each community and person will have their own process for making a tobacco tie—give yourself space to learn and make it your own. As with all ceremonies, your intention and effort are what matter, not just following each step a certain way.



1. Cut fabric into a square, about 4x4 inches. Colours of fabric may represent different things, depending on the community.



2. Gather a large pinch of tobacco using your left hand, while thinking about the intention of making the tobacco tie.



3. Place tobacco in the centre of the fabric.



4. Fold the square into thirds.



5. Fold the fabric in half.



6. Tie the fabric together with the cotton string, yarn, or ribbon.



Creating your own grief support plan

This activity offers a place to support your healing journey. It is most helpful when grief and loss feel too heavy. Nurturing the balance and connection of all parts of life can help ground you in times of stress.

Use this worksheet to find your strengths, resources, and strategies. It will help you through the tough or complex parts of your journey. You can edit or add to this plan at any time. Feel free to leave sections blank. Be as specific as you can and keep this resource in a safe place, so it is ready when needed.

“What is it that you do in your journey that helps ... like you're here for a reason still, what is it that's kept you here? What are the things you draw on for support, for help?”

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver,
member of the EKCC

Physical supports

✓ Activities that help me feel grounded and safe:

Examples: Walking in nature, practicing deep breathing, dancing, drumming, jogging, sports

✓ Places where I feel safe and connected:

Examples: Home, community space, nature

Emotional supports

✓ Ways to express my emotions safely:

Examples: Talking to (a trusted and safe person), journaling, creating art



✓ People who provide emotional support:

Examples: Elders, friends, family members, counsellor

✓ Comforting activities or objects:

Examples: Listening to music, holding a meaningful object, taking part in ceremony

Mental supports

✓ Positive thoughts or affirmations:

Examples: I am not alone, I honour my feelings

✓ Ways to manage stress and anxiety:

Examples: Mindfulness exercises, reading, moving my body, smudging

✓ People who can guide me:

Examples: Family members, mentors, friends, counsellors



Spiritual supports

✓ Spiritual practices that bring me peace:

Examples: Prayer, meditation, church services, taking part in ceremony

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✓ Spiritual guides I can connect with:

Examples: Elders, religious leaders, cultural organizations

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✓ Ways to honour my ancestors and traditions:

Examples: Ceremony, storytelling, creating

.....

.....

Emergency contacts

✓ People I can contact in an emergency:

Examples: Family, friends, crisis hotline

.....

.....

✓ Places, resources, and services I can access in an emergency:

Examples: Community health centre, cultural organizations, mental health services, online support

.....

.....



Personal reflection activity

My strength and resilience:

✓ The personal qualities that help me overcome challenges:

.....

.....

✓ My past experiences that help me overcome challenges:

.....

.....

My goals for healing and well-being:

✓ Short-term goals:

.....

✓ Long-term goals:

.....

Feel free to customize this worksheet to better fit your needs and culture. Remember, it is important to reach out for support and take care of yourself as you journey with grief.

“

What are some of the gifts that they carry? Because I think a lot of us don't realize we already have some amazing, powerful gifts within us. And it's tapping into those, and acknowledging, and lifting ourselves up instead of looking at what we don't do, and that we don't have, but looking at what we do carry.”

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver,
member of the EKCC



Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages

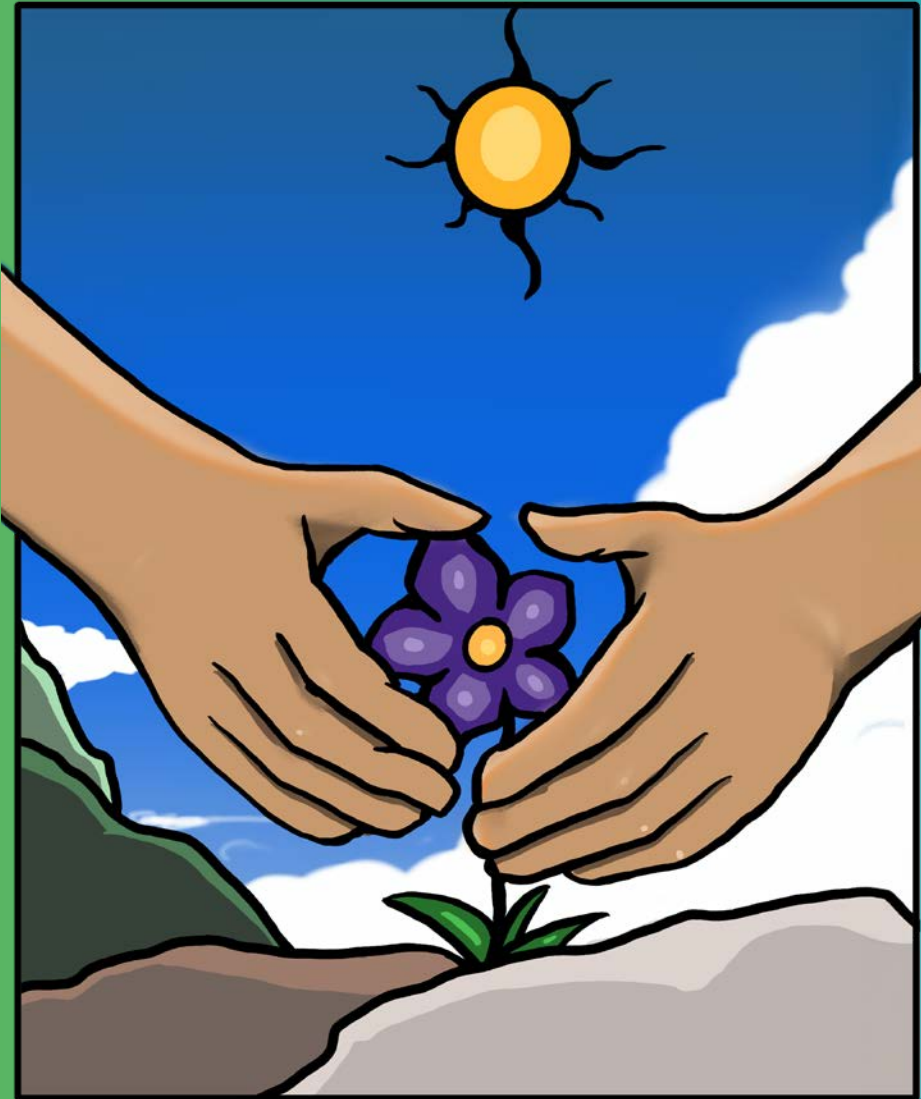
The colouring page below can help centre and ground you as you reflect on your grief. Use it to connect with your physical self and appreciate the beauty of what your hands can create.

Colouring offers a quick break from having too many thoughts. It creates a calm, relaxing space to help you process your feelings. It also offers a way to express emotions that may be hard to put into words.





Emotional wellness creates belonging: Understanding your grief



In summer, Mother Earth is alive and vibrant with flowers in full bloom. The warmer weather and longer days give us a chance to connect with one another. It is a good time to tend to our Spirits.

Learning more about your grief helps you make room in your life for joy and beauty. It helps you to heal by reflecting on the past, present, and future connections that are important to you.



Emotional wellness comes from a strong sense of belonging. These relationships include belonging to family, community, culture, and Land. As First Nations people, we feel grief in ourselves, our families, and our communities. Colonization has impacted many generations.

Losing language, Land, traditions, and family through policies like Residential Schools and forced relocation brings deep grief. This grief still affects our emotional well-being today. These losses can weigh heavily on our Spirits.

But our communities are strong.

They see grief as a journey. This journey includes ceremony, storytelling, and ties to our ancestors and the Land.

AFFIRMATION

I honour and value all of my emotions.

When your healing journey is complicated or stressful, say this affirmation. It can help you feel connected to the people in your life, your ancestors, and the Spirit world.

Plant medicine guide: Sage

Sage has powerful cleansing traits. There are many types of sage across Turtle Island. Communities have unique practices and protocols for working with sage. It clears away negative energy, heavy emotions, and thoughts that may cloud the grieving mind. When faced with loss, sage can help create a safe space for sharing stories, tears, and memories. It also grounds people and communities in healing energy. It helps lighten our heavy hearts while reminding us of our sacredness and strength.

We encourage you to reflect on this sacred medicine and consider ways you can incorporate it into your healing journey.





Understanding grief

Grief is a normal human reaction to the loss of someone or something. It is an internal feeling, unique to each person. It can be experienced holistically: emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. People, families, and communities grieve losses in their unique ways. Their identities and personal experiences shape this process. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

When people think about grief, they often think about losing someone who has died. This type of grief is called bereavement grief.

- ✓ **Bereavement** is how a person, family, or community starts to get used to life after losing someone or something they deeply valued. It is a time when grief is the main part of someone's thoughts, feelings, and actions. It greatly impacts their daily life.
- ✓ **Grief** and **mourning** will both take place during this time, but will continue beyond the initial period of bereavement.

Mourning is a way we express our grief to others, bringing the emotions of grief outside of ourselves. It can be done alone or as a group. It may include activities like creating art, crying, hosting a funeral, talking to a friend, or conducting a ceremony. It can be any other action that expresses one's experience of loss. Sometimes, people can be uncomfortable with mourning or being around those who are mourning. But mourning is a key part of moving forward with grief.

Mourning ceremonies show the strength of First Nations cultures. Teachings related to death, burial, and grieving have been passed down for generations.

While losing someone who has died is a big kind of loss, we can feel grief for many other reasons, too. We might feel grief when we lose something or someone special. That loss could be a friendship, relationship, pet, favourite place, or a community. It can even be for an experience we wanted, like a new job.

Every loss matters. No matter how big or small it seems, if it is important to you, it deserves to be recognized. Your feelings are real, and it is okay to take time to understand them.



Types of grief

Grief comes in many forms. But several factors shape how we experience it. You do not need to fit your grief into a specific box. These definitions can help you put words to what you feel. Be kind to yourself as you reflect on your grief.

When grief is hard to define, it might be:

- ✓ Ambiguous grief
 - Refers to the added pain, sorrow, or confusion that comes from a loss which is unclear, undefined, or without closure. It stops us from working through our feelings. An example of this is when someone goes missing and is not found.
- ✓ Anticipatory grief
 - Involves the grief experienced before the full loss happens. This type of grief comes up when someone knows a loss is coming. For example, it can happen when moving away or due to death from old age or Medical Assistance in Dying.
- ✓ Collective grief
 - Reflects the shared loss of a group, community, or society. This form of grief relates to events like natural disasters, mass violence, losing language or culture, or the death of a public figure in a community.
- ✓ Secondary losses
 - Refers to the additional losses that happen because of a death or other primary loss. These indirect or hidden losses may not be seen in the same way as primary losses, but they still have an impact on our well-being.

We can be impacted by losses outside of human relationships, such as:

- ✓ Cultural loss
 - Involves the loss, limitations, and changes in a community's cultural practices. These losses include ceremonies, language, and traditions. It is often caused by colonization. Colonization is when mainstream cultures overshadow or control other cultures.
- ✓ Ecological grief
 - Refers to the sadness we feel when we see the Land, water, animals, and plants being harmed or gone forever.



✓ Spiritual grief

- Happens when someone feels unsure, challenged, or hurt in their beliefs, faith, or sense of purpose. It can make someone feel disconnected from who they are.

Grief can become more challenging through:

✓ Delayed grief

- Occurs when someone experiences grief long after a loss rather than right after the event. It may happen because the person cannot process the emotions at the time of the loss due to shock, feeling numb, or other factors.

✓ Disenfranchised grief

- Includes grief that is not as openly shared, discussed, or given the same social support as other types of grief. It might make someone feel alone or confused if others do not understand their feelings.

✓ Stigmatized grief

- Refers to grief that is related to circumstances that are not accepted by the community. It often takes place during losses related to drug use or deaths through suicide. It can leave people feeling isolated, judged, or unsupported while they grieve.
- Stigma around grief can be made worse by colonization. Many systems forced on Indigenous communities did not allow us to honour our grief. Families impacted by the Residential School system could not mourn the loss of their language. Fear made them feel that traditional languages were less needed than European ones.

✓ Traumatic grief

- Involves grief mixed with strong emotions from the trauma of how or when a loss occurs. Such a response happens when someone loses a person in a really upsetting or scary way, like witnessing an unexpected death. This pain can be very strong and stay for a long time.

✓ Cumulative grief

- Cumulative grief happens when someone faces many losses over time. Repeated losses can make the grieving process feel heavier and more of a burden. These losses might happen all at once or build up over weeks, years, or even generations.
- This kind of grief can include historical and intergenerational trauma. It impacts not just individuals, but whole communities over time. This trauma includes the loss of culture, Land, language, and community.



✓ Complicated and prolonged grief

- Complicated grief is when someone's grief is very intense and lasts a long time. It makes it hard to manage daily life. Grief is personal and unique. If it disrupts daily life for more than 12 months after the loss, it may be called complicated grief.
- If someone is struggling with complicated grief, it is a good idea to get support. A counsellor, healthcare provider, Elder, or Knowledge Carrier can help.

Colonization and grief

Colonization has deeply harmed how First Nations people experience and cope with grief. Colonization created harmful laws and rules. These systems include the Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the child welfare system. Harmful policies replaced Traditional Knowledges, languages, and healing practices by force. This process ignored and even banned Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Colonization removed people from the Land, creating a break with Spirit.

As a result, many people, families, communities, and entire Nations suffered deep pain and loss. This shared grief is passed down through generations. It leads to issues like poor mental health, addiction, and losing touch with cultural traditions.

Some people feel this grief because they were taken from their families. Others feel it by seeing how much it hurts the people they love. This grief touches every part of us—**mind, body, Spirit, and heart.**

- ✓ **Mentally**, we grieve the loss of passing down our teachings, stories, and languages.
- ✓ **Physically**, we have been separated from the people and Land that shape who we are.
- ✓ **Spiritually**, colonization forced non-First Nations beliefs on us, affecting our traditions and who we are.

“*I’m thinking about young people, about adults, about Elders, about babies. So I wrote down those two words, lost generations, and those are the ones that have never heard even the word for Spirit in the language or for Creator in the language. They’ve not even been instructed in the Bible or any spiritual practice. So I call them the lost generations because they don’t know how to nourish their Spirit or what happens.*”

Gerry Oleman, member of the EKCC



- ✓ **Emotionally**, we grieve broken relationships and the loss of belonging in our communities.

Even with all this pain, First Nations people keep showing strength. Our cultures, communities, and healing practices are powerful ways we resist and rebuild. There's no quick fix for these challenges. But personal healing journeys are a key step. This individual journey helps create positive change for future generations.

Understanding loss and your journey forward: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities

Grief is a deeply personal and normal reaction to the loss of someone or something that matters to us. It impacts us wholistically—heart, body, Spirit, and mind.

In this section, we want to create a space for you to learn more about your grief and understand its impact on you. Try using some of these ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities to help in your healing journey.

Guided reflection: Understanding grief

Grief is something we all feel at times in our lives. It can show up in our thoughts, bodies, hearts, and relationships. Sometimes we know right away we are grieving, and other times we do not notice it until later.

This activity helps you reflect on the grief you may be holding. This grief may be your own or something you have seen in others. There are no right or wrong answers. Take your time, be honest with yourself, and remember: your feelings matter.

- ✓ What grief am I holding in my body, thoughts, heart, Spirit, or relationships?

- ✓ Are there certain types of grief I see in the people around me?



✓ Is there a type of grief I was not previously aware of?

✓ Have there been times when I was experiencing grief that I am only beginning to understand?

✓ Have I grieved with members of my family, chosen family, or community? Do I think this experience was (or would be) unlike when I grieve by myself?



Thinking about loss: Reflection activity

Think about one loss you are learning to grow with. It does not have to be your biggest or most recent loss—just one you feel ready to think about during this journey.

Using words or drawing, use the space below to begin identifying a loss. You may also want to reflect on this loss by sharing it with a trusted person.





Recognizing my grief activity

Grief affects everyone differently. Quiet moments let you see how grief feels, moves, or settles in your life. It can help you understand what is happening inside you.

This activity will help you explore the emotions and reactions that come with grief. Consider the following factors in your experience of grief and reflect on them. If it feels right, consider sharing your reflections with a trusted person in your life.

Emotions in grief

Grief brings up many emotions, not just sadness. You might feel angry, numb, relieved, or even happy at times. All of these are okay. There is no right way to feel. Honouring your emotions is a brave and healthy part of the healing process.

Times of mourning

Some days or events can make grief feel stronger. These times might include:

- ✓ Birthdays
- ✓ Holidays
- ✓ Anniversaries
- ✓ Community days of remembrance (like Red Dress Day or Orange Shirt Day)



These moments can bring back memories or feelings of loss, and it is normal to feel more emotional during these times.

Responses to grief

Everyone responds to grief in their own way. Your reactions can be:

- ✓ **Natural** (like crying, shutting down, or feeling tired)
- ✓ **Intentional** (like journaling, talking to someone, or smudging)

Sometimes our reactions surprise us or feel unlike ‘us’—that is okay. Recognizing your response is the first step to changing it, if that is your goal. Being honest with yourself is a powerful and essential tool in the healing process. Acceptance is a huge step forward in healing.

Remember, this activity is just a starting point. Be proud of yourself for reflecting and know you are doing the best you can with what you know now. You are growing, learning, and healing one step at a time.

Structure

[illegible]



Body mapping activity

Using colours, words, lines, and symbols, body mapping is a practice that can help us see what we are experiencing and how we experience it. Body mapping lets us reflect on grief affects us. It allows us to explore without any pressure to capture everything we think, feel, and experience. How the body map looks does not matter—the process is what matters.

To create a body map, think about your grief. Use colours, words, or symbols to the body shape and nearby areas to represent what you experience and where it is located.

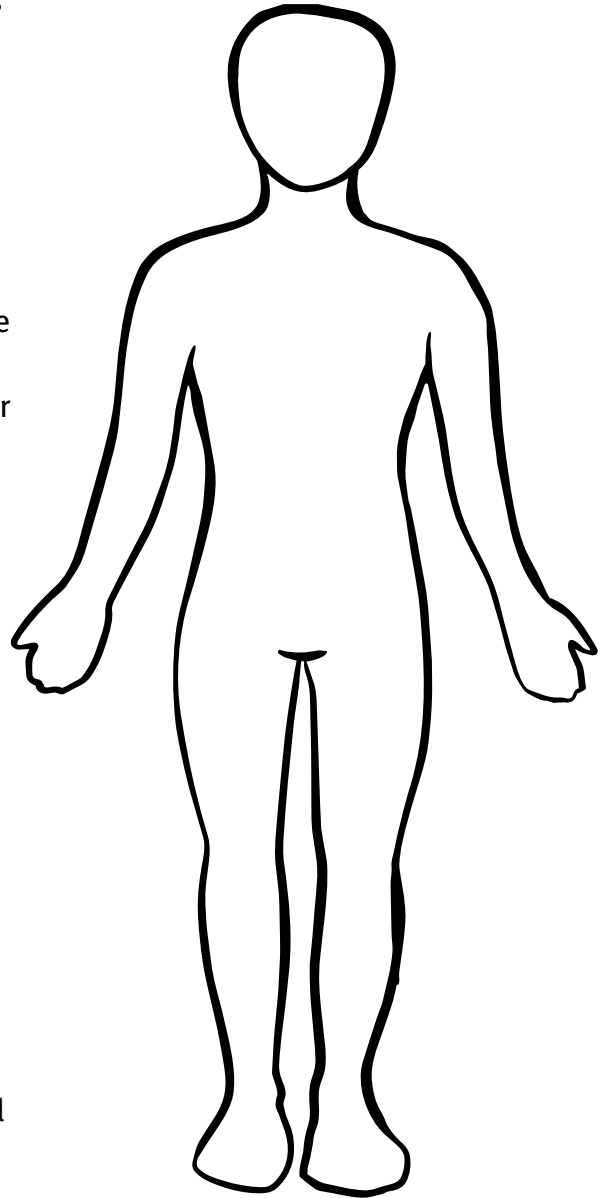
Your body map only needs to make sense to you—there are no rules in body mapping! Expressing yourself through this activity's visual elements may be easier or harder than other types of reflection. Either way, you are doing meaningful, brave work.

Grief is unique to every person. Reflecting on an experience of grief, consider:

- ✓ What do I experience in my body?
- ✓ What emotions does grief cause?
- ✓ How is my Spirit and spirituality affected?
- ✓ How is my mental well-being changed?

You do not need to have all the answers! Adding a colour, symbol, or blank spaces to show to show confusion or lack of feelings is a great addition to a body map. Seeing this in yourself is just as meaningful as any other experience.

Use the body shape to express your experience with grief. Add words, colours, lines, and symbols. Show how it affects you and where you feel it in, on, or around your body.





Community supports build cultural revitalization: Reflection activity

First Nations ways of healing grief are rooted in community, culture, and spiritual beliefs. Healing is about bringing balance back to ourselves, our communities, and our ties to the Land and our ancestors.

Each First Nation has its own ceremonies for important life events, both joyful and sorrowful. In many teachings, life is a circle, and death is a return to the Spirit world. Birth and death are the times we are closest to the Spirit world. Each of these ceremonies is a time when we are brought together—these are times when we can lean on one another.

“I see this in many communities, not just ours, is our cultural approaches to when somebody passes on to the Spirit world. There is a process, just like there’s a process for birth, there’s the ceremonies for birth and celebrating that life, but there’s also that same celebration when they go back home.”

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver, member of the EKCC

Think about how being a First Nations person, or your community’s history, shapes how you carry, deal with, and move through your grief. Write down some words, symbols, or a picture to reflect on this.





Indigenous voices: Reclaiming our ceremonies for grieving

Ceremonies and traditions have carried generations of communities through grief. By doing these practices again, we help our own individual grief. We also help our Peoples and the Land heal since colonization interrupted our traditional ways. Elders and Knowledge Carriers connect us to our traditional ways. They show us how we can carry on these ways of knowing and being.



Death itself is a ceremony.”

Betty McKenna,
member of the EKCC

“Indigenous Voices: Reclaiming Our Ceremonies for Grieving” shares the views and stories of Elders and Knowledge Carriers from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nations. Click or scan the QR code to the right to watch. After watching, you are encouraged to reflect on the following questions:



1. What did the Elders and Knowledge Carriers share that stood out to you? Why do you think it impacted you?
2. How does hearing about the use of traditional practices in grief impact your body, mind, heart or Spirit?
3. How does your relationship to the Land impact how you grieve? How might this connection help your healing?
4. What is one lesson from the Elders and Knowledge Carriers you will take with you on your grieving journey?
5. What responsibility do we have to carry these teachings forward in a good way, for ourselves and for future generations?



Conversations in grief: Reflection activity

Grief is something we are not meant to carry by ourselves.

In our traditional practices, we support one another during hard times. We are stronger when we come together to move through grief.

Talking about grief can feel hard, especially if it is not something you are used to. Starting these talks is key. It helps bring back traditional ways of healing and helping each other.

Some people find it easier to talk about grief in other ways. You might feel more comfortable talking through text messages, letters, phone calls, or emails. Others might find it easier to talk while doing something else, like fishing, cooking, walking, or crafting.

No matter how you do it, talking about grief is a must. When you open up, you help others feel safe to do the same. Your words might make it easier for someone else to share what they are feeling, too.

“

I think the most...you know, a powerful thing from the past, you know, in the colonization of Indigenous people was the silence, the silencing, right, that we could not talk about our emotions. We could not talk about hurt feelings because we had to conform. We had to conform to western ways. We couldn't complain. We couldn't advocate for ourselves. So, I think that silencing is very deadly...whether you're angry, whether you are emotional.

Albert McLeod, member of the EKCC



Sometimes, beginning the conversation is the hardest part. Here are some sentence starters to help you open a conversation about grief with someone you trust. Reflect on what sentences you would use to start the conversation with others.

- ✓ “I lost something (or someone) important to me, and it has been hard.”
- ✓ “I do not need solutions, but can I tell you about...”
- ✓ “I am not sure if this is grief, but I have been feeling...”
- ✓ “I think it would be meaningful if we could have a ceremony for...”
- ✓ “Can I share something with you that has been weighing on me?”
- ✓ “It happened a long time ago, but I have been thinking about...”
- ✓ “I heard this song the other day, and it reminded me of someone (or something).”
- ✓ “I am not ready to talk about it yet, but could you come sit with me?”
- ✓ “I would love it if we could come up with a (prayer/song/memorial) about...”

Remember: It does not matter how you start the conversation—what matters is that you are doing it.





It can be challenging to put our feelings into words. As you move through this guide, consider the following feeling words and how they may fit with your experience.²

Pleasant Feelings							
OPEN	HAPPY	ALIVE	GOOD	LOVE	INTERESTED	POSITIVE	STRONG
understanding	great	playful	calm	loving	concerned	eager	impulsive
confident	gay	courageous	peaceful	considerate	affected	keen	free
reliable	joyous	energetic	at ease	affectionate	fascinated	earnest	sure
easy	lucky	liberated	comfortable	sensitive	intrigued	intent	certain
amazed	fortunate	optimistic	pleased	tender	absorbed	anxious	rebellious
free	delighted	provocative	encouraged	devoted	inquisitive	inspired	unique
sympathetic	overjoyed	impulsive	clever	attracted	nosy	determined	dynamic
interested	gleeful	free	surprised	passionate	snoopy	excited	tenacious
satisfied	thankful	frisky	content	admiration	engrossed	enthusiastic	hardy
receptive	important	animated	quiet	warm	curious	bold	secure
accepting	festive	spirited	certain	touched		brave	
kind	ecstatic	thrilled	relaxed	sympathy		daring	
	satisfied	wonderful	serene	close		challenged	
	glad		free and easy	loved		optimistic	
	cheerful		bright	comforted		re-enforced	
	sunny		blessed	drawn toward		confident	
	merry		reassured			hopeful	
Difficult/Unpleasant Feelings							
ANGRY	DEPRESSED	CONFUSED	HELPLESS	INDIFFERENT	AFRAID	HURT	SAD
irritated	lousy	upset	incapable	insensitive	fearful	crushed	tearful
enraged	disappointed	doubtful	alone	dull	terrified	tormented	sorrowful
hostile	discouraged	uncertain	paralyzed	nonchalant	suspicious	deprived	pained
insulting	ashamed	indecisive	fatigued	neutral	anxious	pained	grief
sore	powerless	perplexed	useless	reserved	alarmed	tortured	anguish
annoyed	diminished	embarrassed	inferior	weary	panic	dejected	desolate
upset	guilty	hesitant	vulnerable	bored	nervous	rejected	desperate
hateful	dissatisfied	shy	empty	preoccupied	scared	injured	pessimistic
unpleasant	miserable	stupefied	forced	cold	worried	offended	unhappy
offensive	detestable	disillusioned	hesitant	disinterested	frightened	afflicted	lonely
bitter	repugnant	unbelieving	despair	lifeless	timid	aching	grieved
aggressive	despicable	skeptical	frustrated		shaky	victimized	mournful
resentful	disgusting	distrustful	distressed		restless	heartbroken	dismayed
inflamed	abominable	misgiving	woeful		doubtful	agonized	
provoked	terrible	lost	pathetic		threatened	appalled	
incensed	in despair	unsure	tragic		cowardly	humiliated	
infuriated	sulky	uneasy	in a stew		quaking	wronged	
cross	bad	pessimistic	dominated		menaced	alienated	
worked up	a sense of loss	tense			wary		

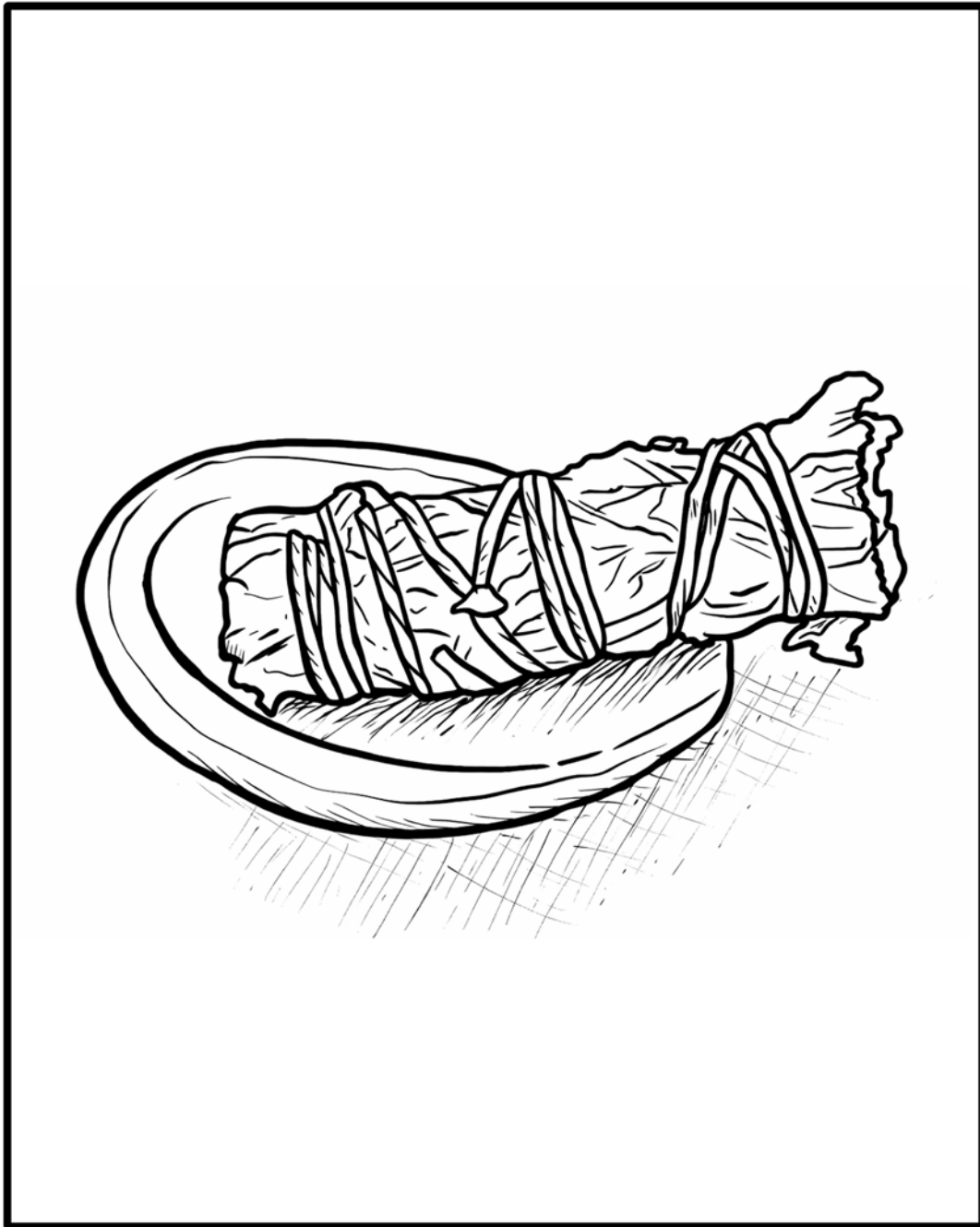
² Psychpage (n.d).



Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages

The colouring page below can help centre and ground you as you reflect on your grief. Use it to connect with your physical self and appreciate the beauty of what your hands can create.

Colouring offers a quick break from having too many thoughts. It creates a calm, relaxing space to help you process your feelings. It also offers a way to express emotions that may be hard to put into words.





Mental wellness creates meaning: Going on your healing journey



Fall brings change, and there is beauty in letting go of the summer. While the leaves are no longer green, fall brings beautiful shades of red, orange, and gold. By embracing the practices and teachings offered in this guide, you also invite change into your life.



The next step of learning how to handle grief as First Nations people and as communities is walking our own paths. This section helps you reflect on your journey. You can deepen your knowledge and find new ways to support your wellness.

Storytelling, ceremony, self-care, and reconnecting with Traditional Knowledge can help us heal. These practices can help us feel resilient, connected, and supported. Traditional Knowledge reminds us that, even through grief, we can find meaning and purpose.

AFFIRMATION

I am growing like the medicine that surrounds me—resilient, rooted, and radiant.

*When your healing journey feels tough, say this affirmation.
It can bring more meaning to your life.*

Plant medicine guide: Sweetgrass

Sweetgrass is a medicinal plant that symbolizes unity, harmony, and balance. Its sweet scent invites positive energy, peace, and healing. Sweetgrass can be used to bring soothing comfort and to remind us of the beauty and resilience of life. Spending time with sweetgrass can help reawaken our connection to our ancestors and the cycles of Creation. Sweetgrass can help

reframe grief from a place of pain to one of honouring and remembrance.

We encourage you to reflect on this sacred medicine and consider ways you can incorporate it into your healing journey.





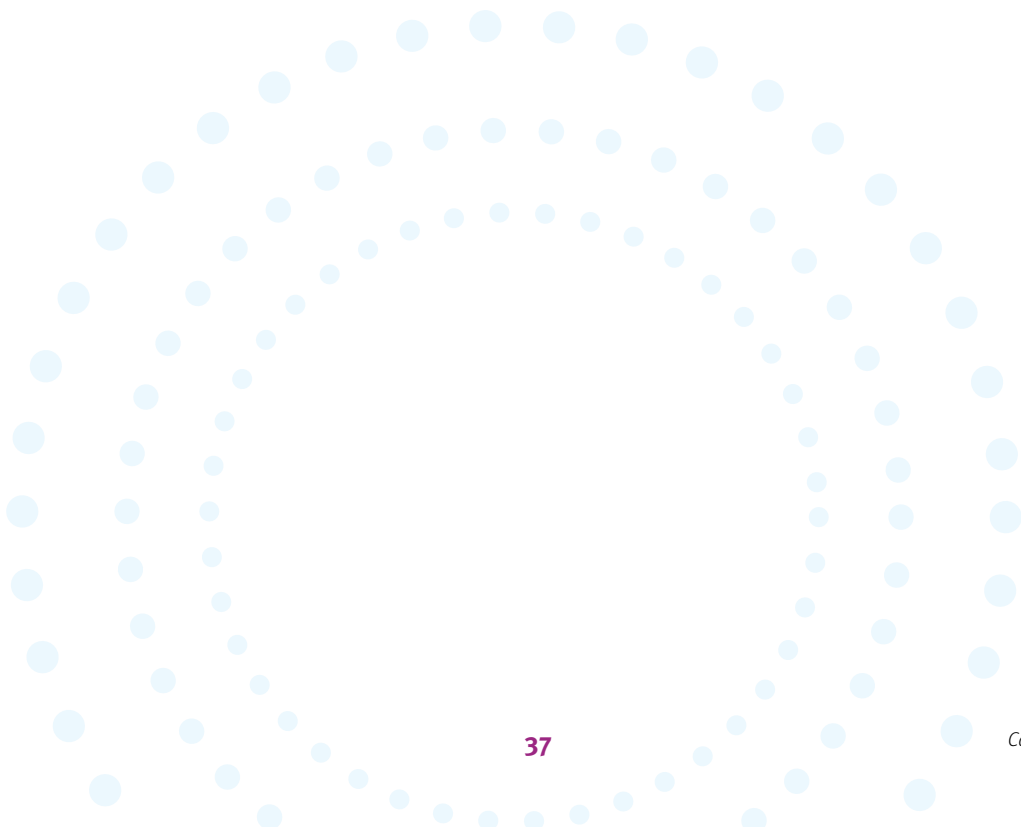
Taking care and building our bundles: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities

A bundle is a collection of sacred items, such as a drum or pipe, that a person receives during their life. These items carry important teachings and responsibilities. A bundle provides direction. Bundles can also bring together shared knowledge, teachings, practices, and ceremonies. Teachings and ceremonies will be there to aid you in this guide.

The healing activities in this section engage your senses: sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound. Our senses help us experience the world in powerful ways. These activities also aim to strengthen your connection to yourself, your family, those in the Spirit World, and the Land. Each activity enhances your bundle. Your bundle is your collection of knowledge and skills that help your overall wellness.

There is no right or wrong way to use these healing activities. As long as you approach this process with good intentions, your Spirit will guide you through the learning and reflection that is right for you. You can look at these activities in any order, at any time, and only if you feel ready.

Everyone's healing journey is unique. Listen to your heart, follow your inner senses, and choose what feels right for you.





Healing activity: Writing affirmations

What are affirmations?

Affirmations are positive statements that help remind us of our strengths, values, and the kind of person we want to be. These statements can help us build confidence, stay focused, and feel supported. This practice is vital when we are going through something hard or need to hear something positive.

Affirmations are kind, powerful words we offer ourselves, like a pep talk. These words remind us of who we are, what we stand for, and the person we are becoming. You can say them out loud, write them down, repeat them in your mind, or even post them on your wall or mirror to see every day.

“*Like there’s a term, ‘relaxed concentration.’ If you can get them into relaxed concentration about a story, or about music, or a ceremony, then it was powerful. Doing what it’s supposed to do. When people resist and have doubt, that’s when they struggle. But can you give yourself to something, music, medicine, ceremony, ritual? It does its job.*”

Gerry Oleman, member of the EKCC



Part 1: 30 days of affirmations

Below are affirmations developed by the Elders, Knowledge Carriers, and team members who worked on this guide. These expressions are rooted in traditional teachings and lived experience with grief, loss, and healing. These affirmations are meant to offer comfort, strength, and perspective as you move through your own journey.

Grief is a deeply personal process, but you are not alone. Many have walked this path before. The words and teachings of Elders and Knowledge Carriers shared here carry the wisdom of generations.

As you go forward, consider choosing **one affirmation each day** to reflect on. Let it guide your thoughts, heart, body, and Spirit. It offers grounding, connection, and encouragement, no matter where you are in your healing. Consider repeating it out loud, in your head, or writing it somewhere you will see it during the day.

1. I am kind and gentle to myself.
2. I am an amazing Spirit.
3. Creator loves me no matter what.
4. The memories we hold are gifts that bring us peace.
5. Our ancestors will visit us in our dreams to remind us we are not alone in this life journey.
6. There are no do's or do not's about how I experience my loss.
7. Today, I hold your memories close to my heart; they will help me balance as I walk in grief.
8. I will honour you with my tears today.
9. The love and memories I carry in my heart sustain me.
10. This Earth journey, to me, is a place of learning.
11. I will write the story of my life, weaving in the fantastic love I have for you.
12. Grief has no timeline; there is no pressure.
13. This feeling is painful, but it will pass.
14. Self-care is not selfish—it is needed.
15. Breathing in, I am calm. Breathing out, I am strong enough to care for these feelings.
16. I DO have the strength and resources to handle this time in my life.



17. I have a team of love and support around me. We take care of each other.
18. I am safe; I am loved; I am capable.
19. The stories are the medicine that fill in the gaps of the self and show us who we are.
20. I carry a gentle heart and a strong mind.
21. My emotions are my strength.
22. I can trust my intuition.
23. I am everything my ancestors dreamed of.
24. I honour my body's need for rest.
25. It is OK to let go of emotions that do not serve me.
26. There is no right or wrong timeline for my grief.
27. Laughter is good medicine.
28. Grief does not need to be fixed; it is part of being human.
29. I am patient and kind to myself because I deserve it.
30. I carry the strength of all the generations before me.

Part 2: Creating an affirmation

A simple way to start an affirmation is with the words:
"I am..."

Here are some examples:

- ✓ I am strong.
- ✓ I am enough.
- ✓ I am kind to myself and others.
- ✓ I am always learning and growing.
- ✓ I am connected to something greater than myself.





Your turn: Build your own affirmation

Below is a list of powerful words. Read them and **circle** any that speak to you—ones that describe who you are now or who you want to become. Then, try writing your own affirmation using those words or your own.

I am...

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
| ✓ Strong | ✓ Knowledgeable | ✓ Grounded | ✓ Kind |
| ✓ Capable | ✓ Intuitive | ✓ Resilient | ✓ Loved |
| ✓ Spiritual | ✓ Brave | ✓ Honest | ✓ Enough |
| ✓ Caring | ✓ Creative | ✓ Open | |

Now write your own affirmation below:

I am

I am

I am

I am

I am



Healing activity: Sacred fires

Sacred fires are a connection between us and the Spirit world. These fires are part of many First Nations ceremonies, including moon ceremonies, sweat lodges, and pow wows. The fire offers warmth, bright visions, and spiritual protection.

When we hold a sacred fire after a person's death, it often lasts for several days. Its smoke carries prayers, memories, and messages to the Spirit world and to those who keep guiding us.

Sacred fires invite storytelling, grief, and reflection. These fires make room for both sorrow and love to exist together. A sacred fire can also be a space for people to offer tobacco or other medicines to the fire. The tobacco and medicines are sent to the Spirit world, and the sacred fire can be a space to grieve together.

Many First Nations consider fire to be a doorway between the Earth and the Spirit world. For feasts or large gatherings, sacred fires are often fed the Spirit plate. This offering is a small amount of food given to the Spirit world before people begin to eat. Sacred fires are also often given medicines and offerings, such as tobacco ties. A fire keeper will watch over the fire until it goes out on its own.

Sacred fires can be challenging to access, especially during busy times like after someone's death. But their teachings can be adapted in many ways. We do not need to hold a full fire. We can light a candle, burn smudge, or burn a tobacco tie. While there can be many protocols around ceremonies like sacred fires, the key elements are intention and connection to Spirit. Good intentions and respect are all that is needed. The Spirit world will see your effort.

“Our fires, we love having fires. And even if it's a party fire or a sacred fire or whatever, but we always have fires. And that's always been, even in our long house, when we have ceremony, we have fires.”

Diane Boots, member of the EKCC

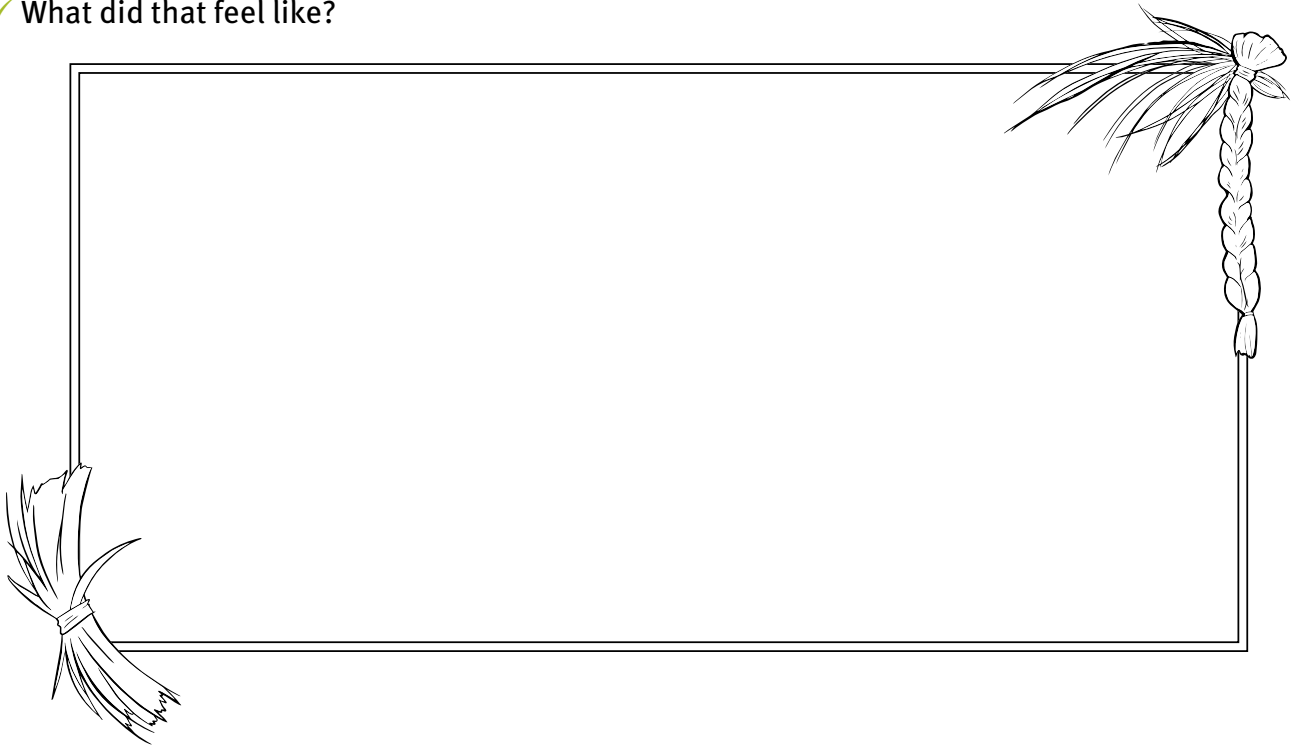




Guided reflection

Take some quiet time to think about the teachings of the Sacred Fire. Then, reflect on the questions below in writing, drawing, or through discussion with a trusted person.

- ✓ What does the idea of the Sacred Fire as a 'doorway' between the Earth and Spirit world mean to you?
- ✓ Have you ever been part of a ceremony or gathering where people shared stories or remembered someone?
- ✓ What did that feel like?





Healing activity: Water is life

Water is more than just something used to bathe and drink—it is a living being with its own Spirit. Water is often present at ceremonies and its use is based on the needs of each ceremony. It is something that connects us to each other and the other elements of Creation. For example, water provides many communities with transportation (such as using boats or an ice road). It gives us all the food we need, by feeding plants and animals.



Because water gives us so much, we need to respect and protect it. This way, future generations can have the same meaningful relationship with water that we have.

Guided reflection

Take a moment to reflect on the questions that follow. Remember, ceremonies do not have to look a certain way to be considered ceremony. The examples are some ways water can be more mindfully involved in our everyday lives.

“*No matter where you live, you’re by the river somewhere. So, we’re connected to that river.*”

Diane Boots, member of the EKCC

“*It’s always good to go and sit near the water. I find, you know, like if you’re feeling sad or whatever, you sit there and you listen to the little waves. You can hear them.*”

Rosella Kinoshameg, member of the EKCC



How can you connect with water's Spirit?

For example:

- ✓ Thinking about your gratitude while drinking water or using water in your cooking
- ✓ Spending time around a body of water
- ✓ Reflecting on your connection to water while you bathe or wash your hands
- ✓ Recognizing what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch while it rains
- ✓ Watering your plants and watching them grow
- ✓ Learning a water song
- ✓ Moving the water in our bodies through a walk, swim, dance, or other movement

Is there a way I can, or have I, given back to our water?

For example:

- ✓ Using water with intention while cooking or bathing
- ✓ Being respectful and responsible while fishing
- ✓ Joining a sacred water walk within my community
- ✓ Recycling and making sure my garbage is thrown away
- ✓ Staying up to date on the ways Turtle Island and her waterways are being used by companies and communities





Healing ceremony: Purification through smudging

Smudging is a cultural ceremony practiced by some First Nations across Turtle Island. Practices differ, but they often involve prayer, reflection, or mindfulness. Smudging includes burning sacred medicines, such as sweetgrass, cedar, sage, and tobacco. The smoke is used to cleanse ourselves and bring peace when feeling tense. We see variations of smudging across the world. It also exists in various religions, such as the burning of incense in Catholicism and Islam.

We smudge when we call on Spirits or ancestors to help us with our needs in life. We purify our bodies to show respect to the Spirits that arrive to help us.

Here is one way to smudge:

- ✓ First, light a smudge stick or light traditional plant medicines in a container of some kind (such as an abalone shell).
- ✓ Once the medicines are smouldering, move your hands over the smoke as if you are washing them.
- ✓ Then you can bring the smoke to different parts of your body:
 - Eyes: to see the good in others
 - Ears: to listen well
 - Mouth: to speak well of others
 - Heart: to purify our hearts
 - Back: to have others watch our back
 - Hair: to care for our lifeline
 - Down your body: to do good with your body
 - Feet: to walk a good life
- ✓ You use a feather to move air over the smudge to ensure it stays burning for others to smudge. Allow the smudge to burn out on its own and then return the ashes to the Land.

Remember: There is no right or wrong way to smudge—what is most important is that it feels right to you! This ceremony can be as long or as short as you would like and can be used whenever needed.



While smudging often involves smoke, there are many alternatives to smudging without smoke. You can hold unlit medicines close to certain areas on your body. You can also use a misting spray with the essence of sacred plant medicines on or near your body. These alternatives can be helpful when someone wants to smudge but cannot or does not want to be around smoke.

Guided reflection

Take some quiet time to think about the practice of smudging. Then, reflect on the questions below in writing, drawing, or through discussion with a trusted person.

- ✓ Which body part's smudging (eyes, ears, heart, etc.) resonated with you the most? Why?
- ✓ In your own life, are there ways you cleanse or reset when you are feeling stressed or isolated?





Healing activity: Sweetgrass teachings

Sweetgrass is a sacred medicine, often associated with kindness. We treat it with immense respect, braiding it with the gentleness that we would use to braid our grandmother's hair. You can harvest sweetgrass in natural areas, or you can grow and harvest it from a garden.

Braiding Sweetgrass

In one teaching, the three main strands of sweetgrass represent our ancestors (past generations), the future generations, and sacred teachings.

These three strands braided together honour the deep connections between past, present, and future. A single strand of sweetgrass breaks easily, but a braid is strong. We, too, are stronger when we lean on teachings, family, and our history. We are never alone. The Spirits of those who came before us, the ones yet to come, and the wisdom we carry walk beside us.

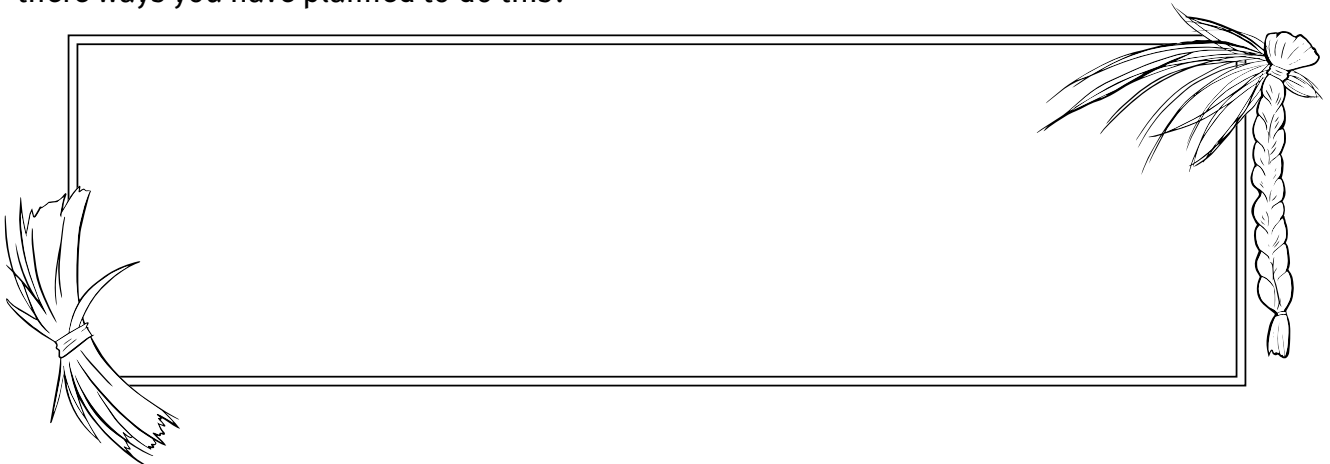
Elder Betty McKenna also shares why a **fourth section of sweetgrass**—the smaller strand that ties the end of the braid—is key. This piece represents **community**. It holds everything together, reminding us community is essential to our strength and healing.

Because all things are connected, the healing you do for yourself also brings healing to your ancestors and to future generations. Braiding sweetgrass is not just a teaching; it is also a time for reflection. It helps you think about your place, your story, and your journey.

Guided reflection

Take a moment to reflect on the teachings of sweetgrass. Then, reflect on the questions below in writing, drawing, or through discussion with a trusted person.

- ✓ Are there any teachings, knowledge, or traits from your family, friends, partner, or ancestors that you carry with you?
- ✓ What teachings, knowledge, or traits would you like to pass along to future generations? Are there ways you have planned to do this?





Healing activity: Brushing ceremony

Guided reflection

While learning about a brushing ceremony, consider:

- ✓ What would it feel like, or what does it feel like, to release a burden you have carried in grief? Are there times you have found it hard to forgive someone who has died or is no longer in your life?
- ✓ Is there a type of grief you think would be best supported by a brushing ceremony?

Ceremonies surrounding death can be a sacred way to honour the person with a life-changing illness and support our own healing journey. There are many variations of brushing ceremonies across Turtle Island. Communities use sacred items such as eagle feathers and cedar boughs to remove burdens. St'at'imc Elder Gerry Oleman shares his teachings on brushing ceremonies here and below.



“A brushing ceremony helps take away mistakes of those who have died. You do a ceremony to brush the relative that passed, when the Spirit left, and it’s just a body there now. They say the Spirit hangs around for four days in my culture, so they brush the body to take away the mistakes between the relatives and friends and the one that’s left, so it’s over now. It’s done. Now they can travel through the Spirit world because we’ve taken it. You, too, let go of those mistakes that happened between you and your loved one. Because we’ve taken it now and it’s in the branches or whatever you used.”

Once the person has been brushed, “you put (the branches or what you used to brush) back into the earth or the water. Now, we’ve taken those mistakes and put them where they won’t hurt anybody anymore. You know, that’s a beautiful ceremony. If people understand it. We would have people come in and go over your loved ones, with feathers or branches of medicine, to take away the mistakes that were made between human beings, because all human beings make mistakes. But now we’re going to take it and put it where it won’t hurt anybody anymore.”

Can it only take place right after someone has died?

“It’s a beautiful little ceremony, so I’ve done it over the body and also the graveyard, I’ll do it over when they’re all covered up. I’ll use branches and I’ll sweep it, and the significance is, again, taking away mistakes between this one and the ones that are still here, so it won’t hurt anybody anymore.”



Healing activity: Cedar tea and teachings

Cedar tea is a traditional medicine used to cleanse the body, mind, Spirit, and heart. It removes negative energies and promotes healing on all levels. It is a plant medicine that exists across several parts of Turtle Island and has been a source of sustenance and comfort for generations.

Cedar is most often associated with safety and security. In some communities, people place cedar above doorways and windows for protection. Beyond its ceremonial role, cedar is a living provider—it creates oxygen, offering breath to all beings. Cedar trees also help maintain healthy ecosystems. They protect soil and water, and provide shelter to many forest creatures. It is both physical and spiritual medicine.

When harvesting cedar, we should show the trees respect. We can do this by taking only what we need. We also place a tobacco offering at the base of the tree. Plus, we collect from different plants to prevent overharvesting of any one species.

Enjoying a cup of cedar tea is a great opportunity for a moment of mindfulness. It provides you with a moment to be present with yourself, your thoughts, and the tea you have prepared.

Here are some links to the RRC Polytech in Manitoba (<https://www.rrc.ca/indigenous/2020/03/25/healing-with-cedar-at-home/>) and the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (<https://www.creehealth.org/health-tips/traditional-medicine-cedar>), which provides information on how to prepare cedar tea.



Reminder: As with all medicines, use awareness when taking cedar tea. Typically, you should not drink more than 3 cups per week. Talk to an Elder or healthcare provider if you are pregnant or have health issues that affect the use of traditional medicines.





Healing activity: Emotional release

In grief, emotions can be complex and are constantly changing. When we are experiencing a range of hard and mixed emotions, it can be too much to express them all.

Elder Gerry Oleman shares, “Most of the healing, I think, with Indigenous people is what I call no-talk therapy. Therapy means rituals and ceremony. But there’s release happening, tremendous, like tears, sometimes screaming, sometimes dancing, sometimes, you know, like movement to get that energy out of you.”

To support this, Kanyen’kehà:ka Elder Diane Boots shares her teachings on an emotional release practice here and below.



When would I need this emotional release practice?

“If you’re emotionally clogged up, you’re not going to go anywhere. You’re just going to stay in that pain and you’re going to say, ‘I can’t function, I can’t think, I can’t make decisions,’ anything because you’re just frozen in time. So, you need to get that out. You need to get that breath back into your body.”

How do we do an emotional release?

“I usually will put them through a sacred fire, and I do emotional release with them. I do emotional release by using your breath, by yelling, by telling your story. There’s all different kinds of ways that you can do emotional release, but I would usually use a sacred fire for it. Especially when it is sudden and they need to get the emotion out, they need to get that out and scream and say “why? why?” you know, and that anger that comes out and everything.”

See more about sacred fires in the previous healing activity: sacred fires.

What is the purpose of the ceremony?

“They just need to be able to feel a breath again, and by doing an emotional release, they can achieve that. Because that’s what they tell me after. They say, “Oh my God, I can breathe. It’s not on me right now.” You know, when I do that, it might take hours for me to work with somebody until they finally allow that to go.”

Emotional release can help families release stress, anxiety, and emotional pain. This release is especially needed before, during, or after a loss. Emotional release can help bring clarity, peace, and relief from emotional distress. Some people will feel a new positive energy and become energized or relax enough to sleep.



Try this daily exercise to feel grounded and to boost your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

- ✓ Take three very deep breaths in through your nose. Fill your belly and lungs. Hold for at least five seconds. Then, blow out through your mouth.
- ✓ Now you need to ground yourself. Get into a strong stance by placing your feet just outside your hips. Close your eyes and take three slow breaths.
- ✓ Now you are going to imagine tree roots growing out of the bottom of your feet. Imagine the roots going through your flooring, the wood or metal, the subfloor, gravel, and sand. Continue until you find a huge rock in the ground and wrap your roots around it to ground yourself.

Grief release exercise

The next exercise describes emotional release. This exercise can be done by yourself or with the support of another person guiding you. This experience is something very private, so trust between the two people is needed. Also, find a private place where people will not hear.

If you are the one helping someone through this:

1. Ask the person to share the feelings and/or experience they want to release.
2. Stand to the side of the person and do the following:
 - a) Smudge the person down with the selected medicine. You can use sage, sweetgrass, water, or other herbs.
 - b) Ask the person to take three long, deep breaths in through their nose, out through their mouth.
 - c) Agree on a location of a 'garbage pail,' which is a symbolic container and space close to them. They will need this garbage pail to throw their emotions or experiences into when they blow or yell.
 - d) Ask the person to picture whatever their emotional pain is (loss, trauma, etc.) and to give it the form of a ball and place it in their stomach. Give the person time to let it grow by taking slow, deep breaths in and out. Ask them to nod when they are ready to release.
 - e) When they are ready, your role as a helper is to take a feather or your hand and place it on the lower front area of their stomach. With your other hand, gently press on the opposite side of their back. Your job is to pray for their safety and release.
 - f) You will tell the person they no longer need to hold onto this pain. Ask them to take a deep breath in and exhale forcefully, bringing up the emotional burden as a 'ball.' You



will help them bring this ‘ball’ up through their body by connecting with their energy and pulling it out through their mouth. Afterward, prompt them to throw it into a garbage pail. As you practice, you will learn to sense what is being released. You will know how many times the person needs to repeat this process. If they feel light-headed at any point, give them a break and encourage them to start when they are ready.

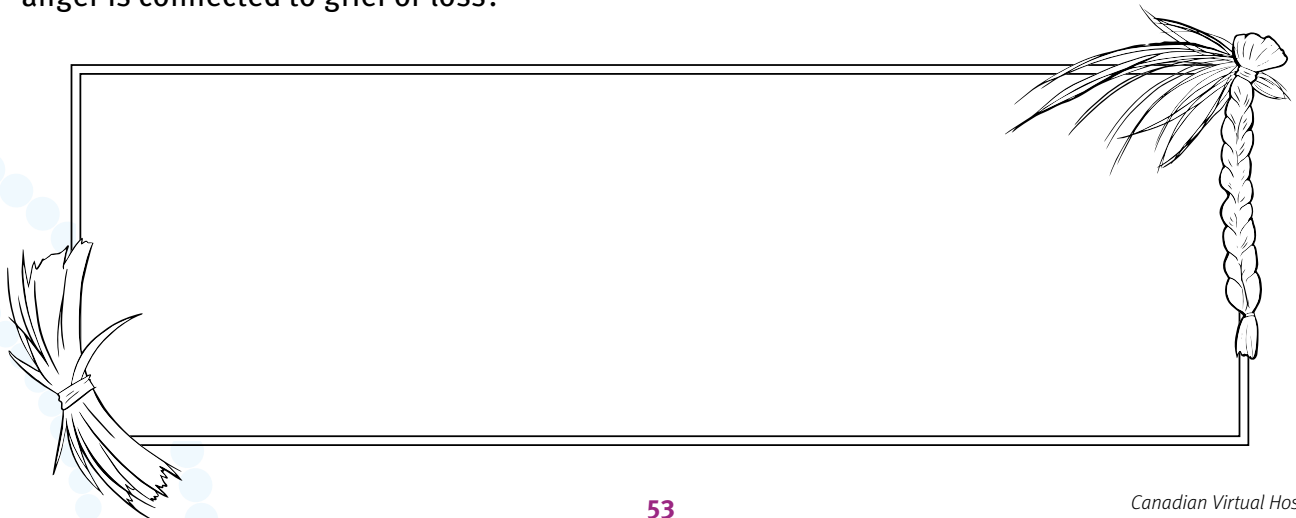
- g) Once the person feels comfortable with blowing, prompt them to give it voice. Some people might feel uneasy about yelling or screaming. Reassure them that it is okay. Make sure that the environment is safe for them to express themselves. Many of us have been taught our whole lives not to yell or cry. If someone cannot scream, ask them to picture the person or event that harmed them and imagine yelling at that person/event. Some people may feel light-headed or nauseous. They may also have a strong urge to stomp their feet to let out pent-up energy. Remember, these emotions have been stored in their bodies for years, so it is crucial to be patient. Encourage them to continue expressing themselves, but do not force them; some may need to take small steps at a time.
- h) When they say they are finished, help the person relax by smudging them and providing water or an herbal drink. They must care for themselves as though they have just undergone surgery. They should rest, avoid going out in public, and drink plenty of fluids.

If you prefer, you can also perform this activity on your own. To do this alone, hold both palms open below your stomach. Then, pull the energy up and out through your mouth.

Guided reflection

Take a moment to consider emotional release. Then, reflect on the questions below in writing, drawing, or through discussion with a trusted person.

- ✓ Is there a tool you use to release emotions in your daily life?
 - Examples: music, a certain TV show, physical activity, smudging
- ✓ When you are feeling anger, how does it show up for you? Does that experience shift when the anger is connected to grief or loss?





Healing activity: Jingle dance

The Jingle Dance is a special traditional dance performed at powwows and other events. The dancer wears a dress decorated with many small metal cones. These cones make a jingling sound as the dancer moves. The Jingle Dance is a healing dance.

At a powwow, you might have the chance to ask a Jingle Dancer to dance for someone's healing, which can be your own or for someone (or something) else. If you want to do this, you should talk to the dancer before their song begins. You do not have to explain why you are asking unless you want to. You can ask with words or by giving them a **tobacco tie** (see previous teachings on tobacco ties), as a respectful offering for their support.

Guided reflection

- ✓ How might it feel to ask someone to dance for your healing? Why do you think someone may choose to do this?

History of Jingle Dance

A well-known history of the Jingle Dance originates from the Ojibwe Nation during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. A young Ojibwe girl became very sick. Her father was worried she would not survive, so he prayed to Creator for help. In a dream, he saw a special dress and a healing dance.

After the dream, he made the first Jingle Dress for his daughter. When she wore the dress and began to dance, she slowly started to get better and was then healed from her illness. Since then, the Jingle Dance has been a way to bring hope, strength, and healing to others.



Guided reflection

- ✓ What stands out to you about this story?
- ✓ What does this story teach you about healing, resilience, and your responsibility to carry this knowledge forward in a good way?



Healing activity: Music as medicine

Grief is not a straight path. It has many layers of personal loss and intergenerational trauma. This grief also includes the ongoing harms of colonization.

Music is a traditional medicine. Our communities use it to honour emotions, reflect, tell stories, and connect with one another.

This playlist can be a space to reflect, remember, relax, and connect with oneself. It features traditional and modern music from First Nations artists. These songs may connect with you and your grief. We invite you to take some time to listen to this playlist, or create your own, and listen however it feels right for you.

- ✓ [Remember Me](#) by Fawn Wood
- ✓ [Blackbird](#) by Emma Stevens
- ✓ [Honor Song](#) by Jeremy Dutcher
- ✓ [Prayers for the People](#) (feat. Tonia Jo Hall) by Joel Wood
- ✓ [Land Back \(featuring Boogey the Beat & Northern Voice\)](#) by A Tribe Called Red (now The Halluci Nation)
- ✓ [Home to Me](#) by N'we Jinan Artists (Attawapiskat Youth)
- ✓ [HOKA](#) by Boogey The Beat
- ✓ [Warpath](#) by Drezus
- ✓ [Hear Our Prayers](#) (feat. Tonia Jo Hall) by Joel Wood
- ✓ [Darling Don't Cry](#) by Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Red Bull
- ✓ [I'm Right Here](#) by Young Spirit
- ✓ [Pain & Strength](#) by N'we Jinan Artists (Kyuquot, BC)

“*That’s one of the things that the young people shared with me, that, you know, these are the things that really helped them go through that grief, is the sacred fire. Offering of the tobacco and also the smudging and the drumming and the singing that really helped because, I think when that drum beats, you know, it just gives you that energy, that power.*”

Rosella Kinoshameg, member of the EKCC



- ✓ [Gentle Warrior](#) (featuring Devon Paul and Thunder Herney) by Kalolin Johnson
- ✓ [We Shall Remain](#) (It Wasn't Taken Away) by Kalolin Johnson
- ✓ [You Are My Sunshine](#) by Kalolin Johnson
- ✓ [Time Traveler](#) (feat. Desirae Harp) by Lyla June
- ✓ [Mamwlad](#) by Lyla June
- ✓ [Sky World](#) by Bear Fox performed by Teio Swathe
- ✓ [Tree Song](#) by Carl Swan
- ✓ [Eagle Song](#) by Red Shadow Singers
- ✓ [Water Song](#) by the Akwesasne Women Singers produced by Mohawk Media Creations
- ✓ [Walk With Me](#) by Adrian Sutherland
- ✓ [Dirt Roads](#) by Tia Wood
- ✓ [Wildflowers \(Creeland Cover\)](#) by Art Napoleon
- ✓ [Redemption Song & Talkin Bout a Revolution \(Creeland Cover\)](#) by Art Napoleon



Healing activity: Crafting and the Spirit Bead

What is a Spirit Bead?

When someone creates beadwork, they put great care, time, and meaning into the designs. Beading can be a calming, creative, and healing practice. Within beading, a Spirit Bead is a bead that does not match the others in a pattern. It may be the wrong colour for its location. It might seem like a mistake to some people, but it is placed there intentionally.

This bead reminds us of something key: We are not perfect, and that is okay. Our imperfections and imperfect experiences are part of what make us beautiful, human, and unique.

“*But once you introduce an action, like making a piece of art, then it motivates your body, your psychology, to show that you are doing something. You’re responding in a tangible way that you can recognize. And then you have a piece that you can look at and say, ‘Well, this is when I did this. This is how I felt when I did this.’... It’s just not a mental thing or an emotional thing happening in your brain or your Spirit. It’s actually, you are working your hands or you’re working your artistic part of yourself to give emotion to something.*”

Albert McLeod, member of the EKCC

The meaning behind the Spirit Bead

Often, Spirit Beads are not hidden and are displayed proudly within the beadwork. These beads offer teachings about humility. This teaching shows that our imperfections deserve love and remembrance, not shame.

It reminds us that in life, just like in beading, we will make mistakes, take wrong turns, or face challenges. Instead of trying to be perfect, we can find beauty in any situation, even when something does not go as planned.

Every bead, even the one that ‘does not fit,’ has a purpose in the design, just like every experience we have helps shape who we are.



Guided reflection

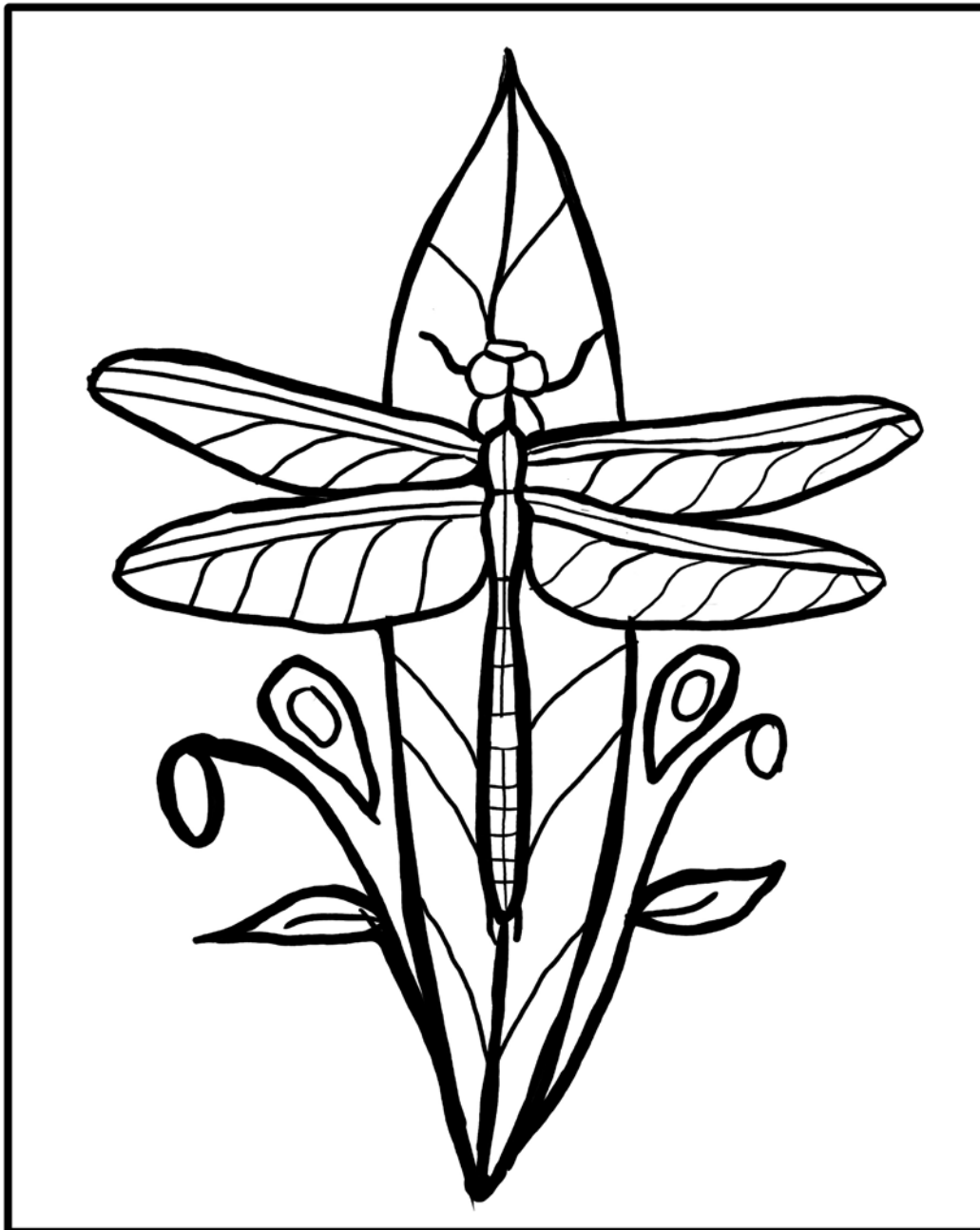
- ✓ How does this teaching relate to grief and mourning? Does it apply to your experiences?
- ✓ What thoughts and feelings come up while you reflect on the use of a Spirit Bead?
- ✓ Does it impact how you think about mistakes?



Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages

The colouring page below can help centre and ground you as you reflect on your grief. Use it to connect with your physical self and appreciate the beauty of what your hands can create.

Colouring offers a quick break from having too many thoughts. It creates a calm, relaxing space to help you process your feelings. It also offers a way to express emotions that may be hard to put into words.





Physical wellness creates purpose: Following up with support



Winter silences the world. It makes everything slow down and is a season for reflection. Use this quiet time to reflect on all the good things you have done for yourself to help you in your journey. Be grateful for how far you have come and look forward to the healing that lies ahead.



Grief does not disappear as we move forward—it becomes a part of us. We learn how to carry it in a way that brings meaning and strength.

Healing is not about forgetting but about growing. To keep healing, we need to stay connected to what supports us, including community, language, and culture. Lasting change takes time and care, and it grows through these relationships.

Taking care of ourselves in a whole and balanced way is key. This balance means moving, eating well, resting, connecting with others, engaging in ceremony, and honouring what matters to us. These actions help us hold on to the healing we have done.

AFFIRMATION

I will move forward with purpose.

When your healing journey is complicated, say this affirmation. It can help you regain a sense of purpose and keep moving forward.

Plant medicine guide: Cedar

Cedar is a medicine of protection and purification. It is a direct tie to the Land and is known as a protector when we are vulnerable, which grief and loss often bring. You can burn cedar in a ceremony or add it to cleansing rituals. It helps people cope with emotional wounds and reconnect with the Earth and their community. Its use supports release, grounding, and renewal, allowing space for transformation through grief.



We encourage you to reflect on this sacred medicine and consider ways you can incorporate it into your healing journey.



Where do we go from here? Moving forward with grief: Ceremonies, messages, prayers, and activities

There are many paths forward, and we do not have to walk alone. Elders and Knowledge Carriers carry teachings, stories, and languages from our ancestors. These gifts are meant to be shared. This wisdom helps future generations grow strong.

As we shape our ceremonies and practices for today's world, the heart of our teachings stays the same: Wellness is not just for one person—we build it together. When we support one another, we strengthen our sense of purpose and deepen our bond to all our relationships.

“*We learned that we don't have to address it alone and that people have had similar experiences. People have learned how to deal with, you know, end of life or trauma, and we can work collectively, and we create bonds or friendships or kinship even with people who have gone through similar experiences.*”

Albert McLeod, member of the EKCC

Honouring First Nations languages in grief: My words, my connection

First Nations languages are more than just words—they reflect our worldview, culture, and connection to the Land. First Nations languages are not the same as western languages. Our languages focus more on action and movement than on objects. This emphasis reflects a distinct way of thinking—one that is closely tied to Land, ceremony, and relationships.

When we speak our languages, we connect to our ancestors, traditions, and identity. Language carries oral histories, ceremonies, and teachings that have been passed down for generations. It plays a crucial role in how we understand grief, loss, and the healing process.

Each Nation has its own language and teachings, especially around grief. For example, some Nations may avoid speaking someone's Spirit name after death, while others pass that name on to someone else in ceremony. Elder Betty McKenna shares that within her knowledge, “We don't have any such word that I know of that would say grief. We can really never lose anything.” All these practices are unique. They show respect for the person who has passed and their journey into the Spirit world.



Through language, we honour those who came before us and find strength to carry our grief in ways that are culturally rooted and meaningful. Language shapes our identity and feelings. It guides ceremonies and helps us remember the ones who have journeyed to the Spirit world. Even if you are still learning or making mistakes, your effort matters. Your ancestors are proud of every step you take.

Learning our traditional language helps us reconnect with our culture and community. Even learning small phrases is a powerful way to begin. You can learn greetings or how to introduce yourself. Every word spoken is a way of honouring our ancestors and reviving Traditional Knowledge. Our languages have been preserved across generations. They were passed down through spoken and written words.

We can grow our knowledge of traditional language by:

- ✓ Learning from Elders or Knowledge Carriers
- ✓ Taking language courses
- ✓ Using other resources.

Here are some online resources which can help you learn your language.

FirstVoices

- ✓ An online, community-led dictionary with over 70 First Nations languages
- ✓ An app with over 100 Indigenous language keyboards for your cellphone. It lets you send texts and emails using the letters and symbols that appear in our unique languages.



Canadian Language Museum, Indigenous Language Learning Tools & Resources

- ✓ A list of over 350 online resources. The collection includes articles, apps, historical records, audio recordings, dictionaries, maps, games, and more. These resources are organized by language group and by First Nation.



“*When you’re carrying heaviness, it gets heavier, and heavier. But when you do grieving, that turns the word grief into an action, I-N-G, as an action. So, you start crying, you start doing things to let it out of your system.*”

Gerry Oleman, member of the EKCC



Community-made language dictionaries

- ✓ Many First Nations have developed their own online (and printed!) dictionaries, preserving the words of our peoples in both written and recorded audio form.

You can often find these by searching for [your community's name] language dictionary. For example search "Fort William First Nation language dictionary."

As we learn language, drawing can allow us to express our ideas and feelings in ways we cannot express with the language we have. Take a moment to reflect and **draw** your answers to the questions below.

Remember: The purpose of this activity is reflection. How you draw or doodle is up to you, and it does not need to be precise, polished, or clear to others.

1. What is one word or phrase in your traditional language you already know or would like to learn? Why is it meaningful to you?

“*And she said to me, and it was so kind, she said, ‘if you know one word in a language, you can say you know your language.’ And I’ve heard from our ceremonies that our Spirit has never forgotten our language, it’s still in there.”*

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver, member of the EKCC, sharing from a language teacher





2. What is one small way you could include your traditional language in your daily life?
(Examples: greeting someone, introducing yourself, learning names of plants or animals)



Knowledge circle activity

Elders and Knowledge

Carriers hold core roles in our communities. They carry stories, teachings, traditions, language, and ceremonies. This wisdom has been passed down through generations, and we can pass it on to the next generation. Elders and Knowledge Carriers help us stay connected to our history, guide us through challenges, and support us in healing and growth.

Traditional Knowledge is often shared through oral tradition, spoken from heart to heart, across generations and time.

Some teachings may not be written or shared outside the community. This cultural protocol is why building respectful relationships within our own Nations is so vital.

“*People do not feel connected to their communities and to their Lands and to other Nations. So, we can bring them that connection. And I think that’s important because we are relational people. We build things on relationships. We have the concept of all my relations for a reason. So, we want to be that support for people to feel connected.*”

Dr. Holly Prince, Anishinaabe, Senior Advisor, EKCC



Connecting with Elders and Knowledge Carriers

Elders and Knowledge Carriers are people who lead meaningful lives and are trusted for their knowledge. They may not always be available. But when they are, they provide powerful support in learning about language, ceremony, wellness, and grief.

Approaching with respect

Each community has its own processes, but here are some general steps for asking an Elder or Knowledge Carrier for support:

- ✓ Introduce yourself: Share your name, Nation, or how you were directed to them.
- ✓ Make your request: Say clearly what you are asking for (help, teachings, guidance).
- ✓ Offer tobacco: If possible, offer tobacco when making a request, or when the Elder arrives. This offering shows respect and allows them to decide if they accept the request.

If an Elder or Knowledge Carrier is not available, that's OK. Some Traditional Knowledge can be found in alternative sources. These sources include community organizations, videos, online resources, books, and the people around us.

Colonization made us forget much of our knowledge. It is key to rediscover what we lost, and relearning is key. Knowledge is just as good if it is learned through an alternative source. We are honouring our ancestors and our culture just the same.

“

We are each other's teachers. And sometimes the biggest teachers come in the littlest of packages, you know. Sometimes it's those little, little young ones who blow you away with what they've come to teach you that day, that time and place they've come, and they've given you something that you need.”

Helen Gartner, member of the EKCC



We learn from many people and places, especially over time. These people and places become a circle of support for our learning journey. Look at the image of the hands below and think about:

- ✓ Who or what has helped you learn about your culture, traditions, or history?
- ✓ Where would you go if you had questions about your language, ceremonies, culture, or history?

Instructions

On each of the hands, think of a person or resource that could help. Resources might be a website, book, or place. It may be something that has already helped you learn more about your culture and traditions.





Traditional Knowledge: Strong roots, budding branches activity

Adapting Traditional Knowledge means honouring our roots. It also involves finding new ways to carry them forward. It is about blending ancestral wisdom with what we know today. This balance helps support language, culture, and self-determination.

Our communities have always been strong, resilient, and creative. Today, we continue to build on that strength. We find ways to bring our values into places that have not always supported us, like schools, hospitals, and workplaces.

“*We’re always changing what we do. Changing rules, what the heck is a rule anyway? It sounds silly when you really think about it. So that’s what our ceremonies taught us; that there is no such thing as a rule. There is protocol. And so, protocol is to be able to respect those things that have been here, that actually hold us on the earth.*”

Betty McKenna, member of the EKCC

How are we adapting?

- ✓ In hospitals, some First Nations support workers or Elders provide spiritual care. They help especially during hard times, like at the end of life.
- ✓ In healthcare, First Nations advocates and helpers make sure our values and voices are heard. Traditional use of tobacco is protected in Ontario hospitals and long-term care homes under the Smoke-Free Act.
- ✓ This Act allows a safe place for Indigenous people and their care providers to use smoke in ceremonies, like smudging.

These changes matter. Such policies reduce harm, support healing, and make space for spiritual wellness in non-First Nations systems.



Why adaptability matters

Adaptability is a form of strength. It allows us to walk in two worlds while staying true to who we are. It does not mean forgetting our traditions—it means carrying them with us as we move forward. When we are open to growth and change, we:

- ✓ Face challenges with resilience
- ✓ Practice forgiveness, including being gentle with ourselves
- ✓ Learn to incorporate Traditional Knowledge, within and beyond our own beliefs and practices

“One of the things the Elders always teach us is that, you know, the ancestors give us that old wisdom. But part of taking that old wisdom is adapting it into this current context that we’re living in. So how do we take that old wisdom and this new wisdom that we are living with, and how do we move forward together with that? And through those teachings, and through those ceremonies, and through these practices by giving it to people and giving people that permission to take what we’re offering them and to make it their own, that there is no right or wrong way to do this.”

Dr. Holly Prince, Anishinaabe, Senior Advisor, EKCC

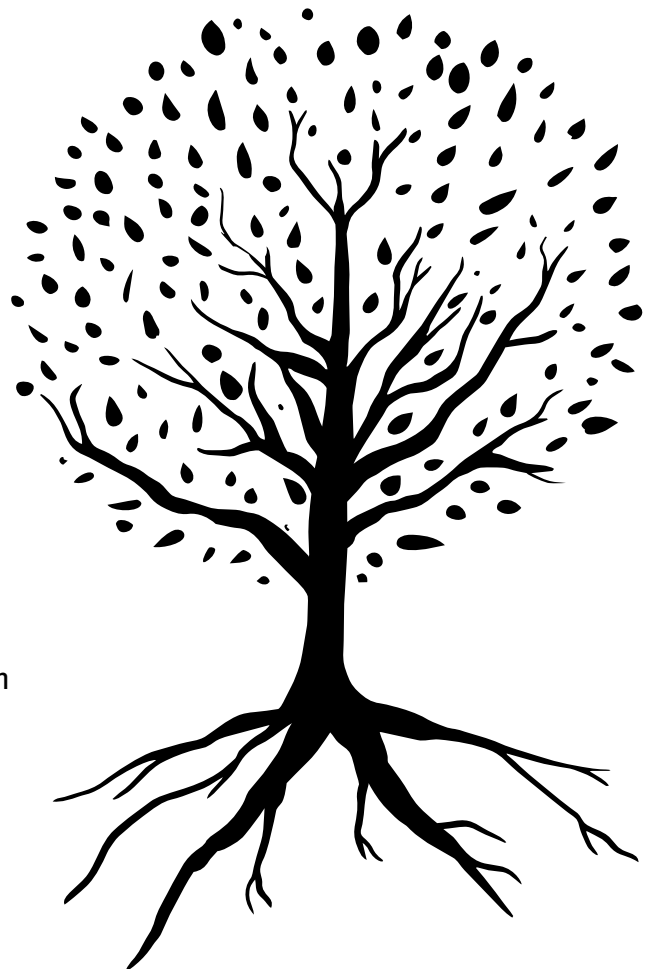
Activity Instructions

This activity helps you reflect on how to stay true to your culture while being open to change. Adapting Traditional Knowledge is like a tree. The roots represent your traditions, teachings, and community knowledge. The branches and leaves represent new ways you are learning, growing, or adapting.

Using the tree beside:

Label 2–3 roots: What traditional values or teachings are most important to you?

Label 2–3 leaves: What are new ways you have seen (or heard of) these values being used today? For example, using traditional medicine in a hospital, learning a language online, or sharing Traditional Knowledge through social media platforms.





Active decolonization and wellness activity

Decolonization looks at the historical and current experiences of First Nations people. It explores how non-Indigenous systems have affected them. It is an ongoing process. We look at the systems and ideas that exist in Indigenous communities. We then ask if they support our ways of knowing, being, and healing going forward.

For example, in non-Indigenous perspectives, wellness often emphasizes self-care. While caring for ourselves is a must, First Nations teachings remind us we are all connected.

“*Within the Yukon, you know what? Everybody’s interconnected there. All the communities we know each other from... So, we’re impacted, we’re impacted and we know grandma, we know an uncle, we knew a sister. All of the time it’s like...so you’re dealing with this continuous grief cycle.*”

Helen Gartner, member of the EKCC

Our wellness depends on the health of our community, Mother Earth, and all of Creation. Instead of trying to fit into non-Indigenous ideas of healing, we can return to our wholistic view of wellness. This approach means looking after ourselves together, helping one another, and caring for the world around us.

Individual and collective wellness

- ✓ **Individual wellness** means caring for your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health.
- ✓ **Collective wellness** means caring for our community, Land, and all living things.

In our cultures, we know true wellness happens together. When our communities and the Land are strong, we are strong too. Healing is not something we do alone; we lean on traditional teachings and those around us to support us.



Rest as decolonizing

In western society, rest is often viewed as a low priority. Western society puts work first. But for many First Nations, rest is an integral part of balance.

For some communities, the winter season is a time for slowing down, reflecting, and restoring. In other teachings, we honour 8 seasons. These teachings recognize the transitional periods between Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. These times of transition allow Mother Earth to prepare and renew herself before moving to the next season. We mirror this process within ourselves, as humans also need time to rest, reflect, and renew.

Resting might mean taking a nap, going for coffee with close friends, going for a slow walk along a river, or taking a bath. These practices are some examples of physical and emotional rest.

It might also mean sitting quietly by yourself, journaling, making art, or enjoying a beautiful landscape near your home. These practices are some examples of mental and spiritual rest.

Rest is a key part of the healing process. You do not need to be ‘fully healed’ to deserve rest. Taking the time to pause, breathe, and tend to your needs is a vital part of your journey.

Remember:

- ✓ Healing is both personal and shared
- ✓ You are allowed to rest, especially while grieving
- ✓ Your wellness is connected to your community, Land, and culture
- ✓ Small steps toward balance and rest are part of decolonizing your path

“

To be a good helper, you have to have your own helper. You have to make sure you're looking after yourself too.”

Kathy MacLeod-Beaver, member of the EKCC



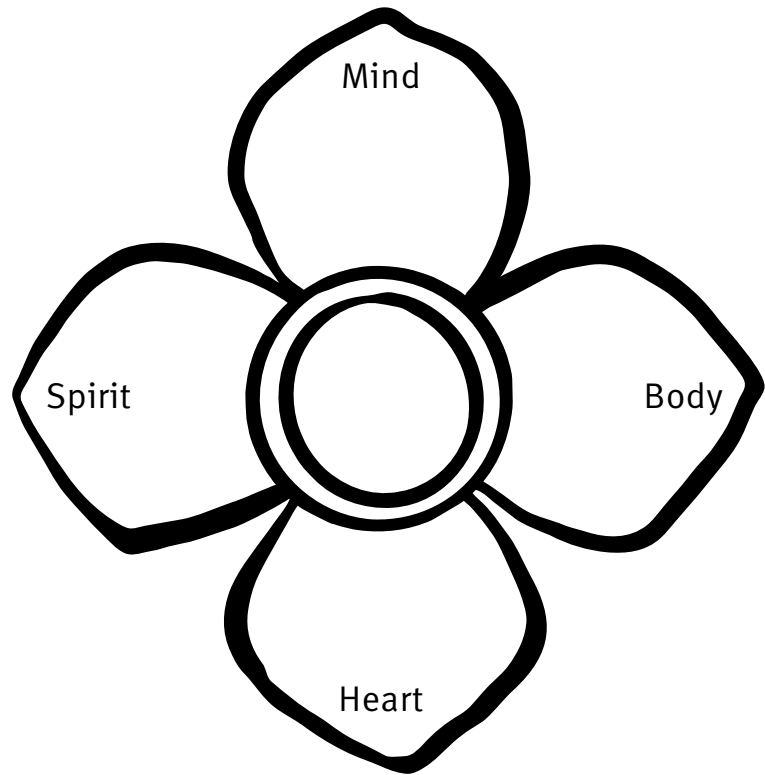
Wellness activity

Consider: How can I support my mind, body, Spirit, and heart to rest?

Write or draw a practice you use, or would like to use, for balanced rest in each of the four petals.

Look back at your grief support plan from the **“Spiritual Wellness Creates Hope”** section.

Do you agree with your focuses, goals, and strategies? Is there anything you would like to add or change?



Additions:

Changes:



Reflection activity: Memories as medicine

Elder Albert McLeod shares that what often stays with us after someone is gone is how they helped prepare us for life without them. Their teachings, love, and presence stay with us in quiet but powerful ways.

Take some time to reflect on the loss you wrote about at the beginning of this guide. Although grief can feel like it is too much, it can also carry messages, lessons, or memories. These messages help us grow and evolve. Lessons can be signs of strength, kindness, laughter, teachings, or simply the way someone made you feel safe and loved.

“Often, it’s a good thing when people are grieving to remind them—precious memories are comforting and they’ll never leave your heart. You always carry those memories in your heart, and so there’s always medicine there for you.”

Helen Gartner, member of the EKCC

TODAY...

*Today is another step without you physically beside me
The sun rose and warmed me, the breeze gently touched my face,
lifting the cloudiness of my mind and cleansing my vision
I whispered a prayer for both of us—a prayer to release the weight of
physical loss, and to hold tightly to the truth that love is the foundation
for all things, and love transcends all time and space
To feel your gentle touch, hear a song at just the right moment, or
remember a memory that makes me smile, I know it is you
I am healing. Be patient with me as I learn to forgive, to grow, and to
live fully again. I will do my best to carry joy, love, compassion,
strength, courage, and peace forward, and to love myself the way you
always loved me—without condition
Until the day I see you when you come and take me home.*

Diane Boots, member of the EKCC



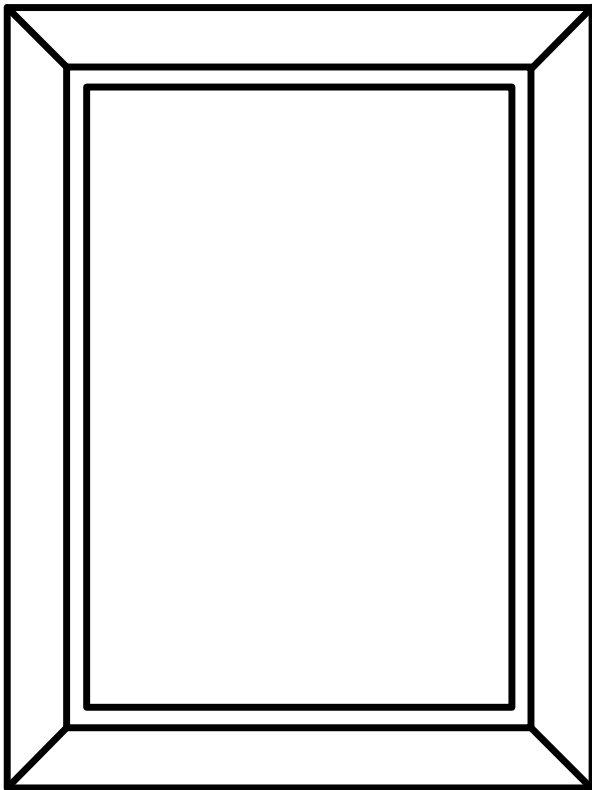
Part 1: My loss' legacy

In the frames below, **draw, write, or describe** a message, lesson, or memory you will carry with you. It may be something that helps you feel connected to what was lost. Or, it may be something you have learned because of this experience. It does not have to be the biggest thing you have learned. Just let yourself follow whatever comes to mind.

(You can use words, pictures, colours, or symbols, whatever feels right to you.)

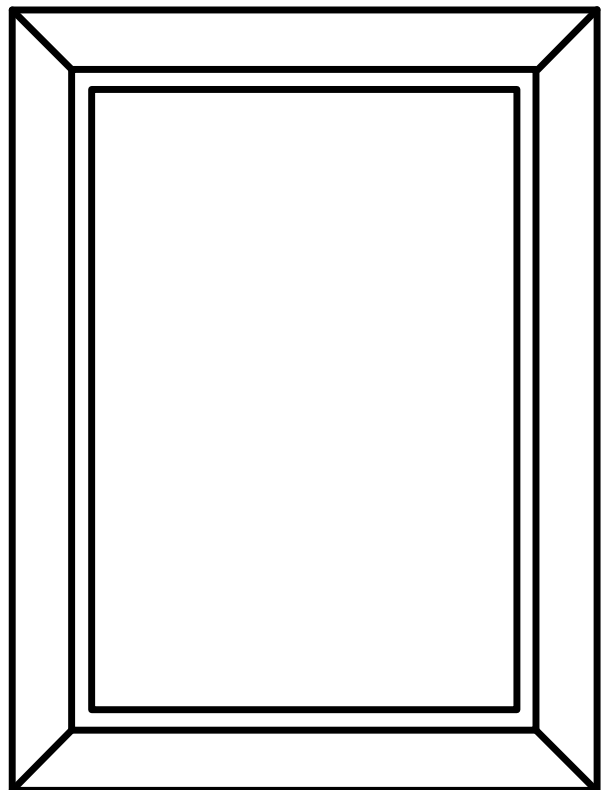
Frame 1:

A message or memory I carry from this loss



Frame 2:

How this message helps me move forward





Part 2: Looking within

Sometimes grief brings up complicated or difficult feelings. That is okay. You can feel sadness and still find meaning. Take a moment to think about yourself and what you have learned through this experience.

- ✓ Is there a teaching, memory, or trait you want to be remembered for someday?
- ✓ Does this shape the way you act or treat others today?

Remember: Grief is not something we 'get over,' it is something we learn to grow with. And sometimes, the memories we carry become a medicine that helps us heal and keep going.

“ I believe that when we pass, it is our soul, our spiritual self, that leaves a body, and it leaves a shell behind. And it's like in a lot of the people that I've worked with, the ritual of opening a window so that Spirit can freely leave is just beautiful. I think that often when I'm flying over somewhere really beautiful, or I see a really beautiful spot from a mountaintop, I tell myself, you know what, I'm going to put this in my memory, and when I leave this world I'm going pass through here so I can see it and say, you know, like just float on by. Yeah, and that's to me what dying is, is going back home.”

Helen Gartner, member of the EKCC



Connecting with our physical being: Colouring pages

The colouring page below can help centre and ground you as you reflect on your grief. Use it to connect with your physical self and appreciate the beauty of what your hands can create.

Colouring offers a quick break from having too many thoughts. It creates a calm, relaxing space to help you process your feelings. It also offers a way to express emotions that may be hard to put into words.







Conclusion: Carrying our bundles home

Thank you for taking the time to explore this guide. Grief is not something that can be rushed or solved. It is something we learn to carry and grow with over time. Your journey through grief and healing is personal, and there is no single path through it. Every step you take is so important.





As you continue, recall the teachings shared here: Healing happens within yourself, your community, the Land, and Spirit.

Revisit this guide in the future. Return after a week, month, or year. This practice can be a great way to reflect on your journey. It helps you see how far you have come. Whether you return to this guide often or only when needed, know these teachings will always be here to support you.

You are not alone. Across communities, generations, and Nations, others are also walking their own healing paths. By taking these steps, you are honouring your grief, your strength, and your tie to something greater.

Be gentle with yourself. Honour your mind, your body, your Spirit, and your heart. Take breaks when needed.

Always trust your Spirit—it will lead you where you need to go.

Miigwetch, Niá:wen, Mahsi Cho, Wela'lin, Ma'na



Appendix: Grief and loss support for First Nations Peoples

Many resources exist to help people dealing with grief and loss. Here is a list of supports for First Nations people across Canada. You can use these as you move forward in your journey.

Crisis support lines

Call 9-1-1 for help right away

Canada-wide:

- ✓ National Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8 (call or text) from anywhere in Canada
- ✓ Hope for Wellness Help Line: 1-855-242-3310
- ✓ Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people (MMIWG) Crisis Line: 1-844-413-6649
- ✓ Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
- ✓ Indian Residential School Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

British Columbia:

- ✓ Kuu-us Indigenous Crisis Line: 1-800-588-8717

Alberta:

- ✓ Indigenous Support Line: 1-844-944-4744

Saskatchewan:

- ✓ 24/7 Mental Health and Addictions Support: 8-1-1

Manitoba:

- ✓ Manitoba Suicide Prevention & Support Line: 1-877-435-7170
- ✓ Crisis Services: 204-940-1781

- ✓ Youth 24-hour Crisis Service Winnipeg: 204-949-4777

Ontario:

- ✓ Talk 4 Healing: 1-855-554-HEAL

Quebec:

- ✓ Canadian Mental Health Association Telephone Crisis Line: 418-529-1899
- ✓ Crisis intervention: 8-1-1

New Brunswick:

- ✓ Tele-Care: 8-1-1
- ✓ New Brunswick Addiction and Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-355-5550
- ✓ Crossroads for Women 24/7 Crisis Line: 1-844-853-0811

Nova Scotia:

- ✓ Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line: 1-888-429-8167

Prince Edward Island:

- ✓ PEI Mental Health and Addictions Access Line: 1-833-553-6983

Newfoundland:

- ✓ Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line: 8-1-1

Yukon:

- ✓ Reach Out Support Line (ROSL): 1-844-533-3030



Northwest Territories:

- ✓ **Mental Wellness and Addictions Support:**
8-1-1
- ✓ **NWT Help Line:** 1-800-661-0844

Nunavut:

- ✓ **Kamatsiaqtut Help Line:** 1-800-265-3333
- ✓ **Youthspace.ca:** 1-833-456-4566

Canadian Virtual Hospice resources

- ✓ **Canadian healing quilt**
An online space to honour, share, and remember the legacy of a person who has died. It allows anyone to add a memorial square to a Star quilt. This style of quilt offers protection in life and honours memories in death. Stitching together life stories from across Turtle Island into the Healing Quilt can be a source of comfort and community. <https://healingquilt.ca/>.
- ✓ **Living my culture: First Nations**
A series of video and print resources that discuss many end-of-life, grief, and loss-related topics. It includes perspectives from many Knowledge Carriers, including Elders, family members, and healthcare providers <https://livingmyculture.ca/culture/first-nations/>.

Grief Support Programming

- ✓ **Gashkendamide'e (be grieved from the heart): Loss and grief support group**
A two-day, Elder-led workshop blending western grief theory with Indigenous teachings. This workshop uses a 'Two-Eyed Seeing' approach. Tailored to each person, it includes cultural and spiritual support. <https://www.hospicenorthwest.ca/services/grief-support-program/>.
- ✓ **HUUG: Help us understand grief**
A program for children and teens dealing with the death of someone. Workshops run from September to May using books, games, art, music, and play. <https://www.hospicenorthwest.ca/services/grief-support-program/>.

Trauma-informed programs

- ✓ **Caring Hearts:**
Offers support and education on grief, loss, trauma, and resilience. Programs include support groups, counselling, educational resources, camps for children and youth, and mental health support for all. For more information, call 306-523-2780 or email contactus@caringheartssk.ca. <https://www.caringheartssk.ca/>.
- Grief & Loss Support Groups
- Healing Circles with Elders
- Suicide Loss Support Group
- Grief Support & Perinatal Loss Groups
- Loss of Child Group
- Anticipating Loss Support
- Art Therapy Workshops
- Death Café (Open Conversation Space)
- Grief Camps



Missing persons and MMIWG2S supports

- Healing circles
- Education sessions
- Trauma-informed care
- Self-care tools
- Family support groups
- Victim services partnerships

Indigenous-specific counselling and supports

- ✓ **Medicine Bear Counselling (Ka Ni Kanichihk)**
Supports families of MMIWG2S with Elder services and counselling.
<https://kanikanichihk.ca/>.
- ✓ **Leading Black Wolf Program**
For youth connected to the child welfare system. Offers support in building independence and reaching goals.
<https://kanikanichihk.ca/children-youth-and-family/leading-black-wolf/>.

2SLGBTQ+ support

- ✓ **2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations: Crisis Response Team (Toronto)**
Provides mental health and crisis support rooted in Indigenous Knowledge and values. <https://2spirits.org/tcss/>.
- ✓ **2 Spirits in Motion Society**
A national organization that supports 2S kin through community, ceremony, advocacy, and youth leadership across Turtle Island.
<https://www.2spiritsinmotion.com/>

✓ **Egale**

Canada-wide organization influencing public policy through education and advocacy. Resource topics include 2SLGBTQI experiences with dementia, mindfulness, and gender-based violence.
<https://egale.ca/>.

✓ **Interligne**

Listening, intervention and awareness services for the LGBTQ+ community. Phone or text 1-888-505-1010.
<https://interligne.co/>.

✓ **LGBT National Youth Talkline**

Confidential telephone line for youth up to 25 years old. Call 1-800-246-7743.

✓ **LGBT YouthLine (Ontario)**

Peer support via chat, text, and email for 2SLGBTQ+ youth aged 16–29. Trained volunteers offer non-judgmental support. Text 647-694-4275. <https://www.youthline.ca/helpline/peer-support-helpline/>.

✓ **pflag Canada**

Created by the parents of 2SLGBTQ+ people, this organization provides peer support and education and has local chapters to build community. <https://pflagcanada.ca/>.

✓ **Qmunity (Vancouver)**

Provides peer groups, counselling, and more for 2SLGBTQIA+ folk and allies of all ages. <https://www.qmunity.ca/>.

✓ **Queer Yukon**

Provides 2SLGBTQIA+ health navigation, health clinics, and harm reduction supplies and education.
<https://www.queeryukon.com/>.



- ✓ **Saskatchewan Queer Mental Health Collective**
Improving access to mental healthcare services for Two-Spirit, queer, and/or trans people in Saskatchewan.
<https://sqmhc.ca/>.
- ✓ **Trans Lifeline**
Trans peer support run by and for trans people. Call 1-877-330-6366.
<https://translifeline.org/>.
- ✓ **Trans Support NL**
Offers peer support groups as well as free counselling on Mondays for Two-Spirit, trans, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-diverse folks in Newfoundland.
<https://tsnl.org/>.

Friendship Centres & health centres

- ✓ **Friendship Centres (NAFC)**
Over 100 centres across Canada offering culture, community, and wellness supports. Some centres support health, housing, justice, and youth programming.
<https://nafc.ca/>.
- ✓ **Indigenous/Tribal health centres**
Offer wholistic primary and mental healthcare, often with traditional healing, doctors, nurses, and counsellors.

Training and education programs

- ✓ **Canadian Virtual Hospice: Indigenous cultural safety training**
A 5-module course focused on culturally safer experiences in healthcare. It looks at traditions, barriers to care, and how Indigenous people can be better supported through advanced illness, end-of-life care, and grief. <https://www.virtualhospice.ca/learninghub>.
- ✓ **Giwiidabindimin Certificate Program**
Training in decolonized practices for grief and trauma, aimed at those working in healthcare, education, and counselling in Indigenous communities.
<https://ctrinstitute.com/topic/certificate-program-in-responding-trauma-grief-indigenous/>.
- ✓ **Sault College: Understanding Indigenous grief and loss**
A 30-hour course exploring grief and loss in Indigenous communities. It includes coping and support methods.
<https://training.saultcollege.ca/courses/indigenousgriefandloss>.
- ✓ **Finding our way through: Facilitator's guide**
A training workshop for frontline workers supporting First Nations peoples through grief. Developed to build community capacity. https://eolfn.lakeheadu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/1_Example_EOLFN_Grief_and_Loss_Manual.pdf.



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