

## Griefwalking (30-60 minutes) v 7

*Tap into social support while moving through a loss or profound transition*

### What is made possible:

- The structure provides individuals with a safe way to reflect on and share their experience of loss, transition, or grief with others.
- Individuals get the support they need in moving forward through their grief/loss.
- Groups will practice forms of helping that require no immediate action, but open up possibilities for deeper connection as needs and resources are woven together.

### Sequence of Steps:

1. (7 mins) Related to a loss or profound transition they have experienced, invite every participant to respond to four open ended sentences\*\* using the Spiral Journal (see collateral materials on page 4):
  - Yes, it is true that...
  - It is hard because...
  - I will always remember and never forget...
  - Now that I have shared my grief, it may be possible to...
2. (2 mins) Once everyone has completed the journal, create four listening stations in an open space.
3. (1 min) Invite any individual who would like to move through grief or loss to momentarily step to the side. These will be the Griefwalkers.
4. (1 min) Everyone else evenly distributes themselves at each listening station.
5. (10-30 mins depending on the number of Griefwalkers) One-by-one, each Griefwalker progresses through the listening stations and reads aloud to the group their full sentence. The group does not respond. One person from that station accompanies the Griefwalker to the next station by placing a hand on his/her back. If possible, the person most moved by the statement should choose to be their accompanist.
  - a. At each station, the Griefwalker only reads a single sentence. So, at the first station it would be “Yes, it is true that...”; at the second station, “It is hard because...”; etc.
  - b. At each station, an additional person will join the Griefwalker. By the end, every Griefwalker may have at least 4 people with a hand on his/her back.
6. (10-20 mins) Each group of 5 then progresses to a quiet space and debriefs on its own. Potential guiding questions for the small group debrief:
  - a. What did you notice as the accompanists? Why did you accompany?
  - b. What did you experience as the Griefwalker? How are you sharing or carrying any of the grief?

c. Now, what do you need from each other?



Figure 1 Griefwalker and two accompanists at the third station at a Seattle LS User Group field test.

*Our sorrow is the other side of love,  
for we only grieve what we deeply care for.* Joanna Macy

Inspired by the work of Joanna Macy, Stephen Jenkinson, and the *My Gift of Grace* cards.

#### **Additional Considerations:**

- Create a safety valve for the Griefwalkers. A place or person off to the side that they can move to at any moment if the activity becomes overwhelming.
- Every station needs to have enough people so that each Griefwalker has someone there to greet them and accompany them. So, for 5 Griefwalkers, there need to be at least 20 people (5 at each station).
- This structure is not intended to permanently heal or alleviate the person's loss or grief. Grief is not a problem to be solved. Griefwalking is a way to make space for an individual and a group to process, support, and attend to the experience of loss and transition together. There is no attempt to *fix* anyone with this structure.

\*\*Other sentences that might provoke healing and rebuilding (mostly drawn from *My Gift of Grace* cards and Joanna Macy's sequence of Affirmation ~ Despair ~ Reconnection ~ Active Hope):

- I must accept that...
- I need help/support with...

- I must learn to live without...
- I need to give up...
- I need to say sorry to...
- I must apologize for...
- I confess that...
- It gives me comfort when...
- I don't understand why...
- My pain is like...
- I am angry that...
- I am embarrassed/ashamed of...
- It is hard for me to ask for help because...
- It is important for me to give away...
- I need give myself permission to...

#### **Riffs + Variations:**

- Griefwalkers carry a ritual walking stick/talking object with them and leave it at the final station
- Use a scarf or any material to create a threshold for the Griefwalkers and accompanist to walk beyond before they start the group debrief.

#### **LS Stringing Options:**

- Combine with Bob Dylan Mad Tea variation to collectively invite a wider dynamic range of emotions and sensemaking into your work
- DAD or TRIZ to explore how healing and rebuilding after loss is often neglected
- Drawing Together to focus attention on the present moment
- Use Conversation Café in the small groups to debrief their experience together or further make sense of the loss/transition
- Follow with HSR or Impromptu Networking
- Precede with Appreciative Interview or other structure to more slowly dip into the grief

#### **Further Questions, Ideas, or Uncertainties** to be Explored and Evaluated with Field Tests:

- Is this about sensemaking or ritual experience?
- Does it matter if the people at stations 2-4 don't hear the accumulated responses of each Griefwalker?
- After station 4, what other options might there be?
  - Griefwalkers greet each other and debrief
  - Each Griefwalkers finishes standing alone, leaving behind their accompanists
- What is the collective result of doing this?
  - What is different with a mixed group vs. intact team?
- Is the structure simple enough for anyone to lead?