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# Honoring Life Through Storytelling

*and Uplifting Youth Voices*





# The aftermath of loss





# GRIEF

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- ❖ Grief is defined as deep sorrow, especially as a result of someone's death.
- ❖ There are no linear “stages of grief;” rather, grief is about loss.



The  
Sadness by  
Jason  
Reynolds  
from Long  
Way Down.

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## THE SADNESS

BY JASON REYNOLDS FROM LONG WAY DOWN

Is just so hard  
to explain.  
Imagine waking up  
and someone,  
a stranger,  
got you strapped down,  
got pliers shoved  
into your mouth,  
gripping a tooth  
somewhere in the back,  
one of the big important ones,  
and rips it out.  
Imagine the knocking  
in your head,  
the pressure pushing  
through your ears,  
the blood pooling.  
But the worst part,  
the absolute worst part,  
is the constant slipping  
of your tongue  
into the new empty space  
where you know  
a tooth is supposed to be  
but ain't no more.



**“YOU HAVE TO SAY HELLO BEFORE YOU CAN SAY GOODBYE” WOLFELT**



**A crucial aspect of grieving is gaining the ability to develop and share stories of those we have lost. We need to provide opportunity to revisit their lives, process the reality of the loss, and revisit our future without them present. There is no expiration date on the grieving process.**



# STORY

Story is defined as an account of past events in someone's life or in the evolution of something. This definition is powerful! It recognizes how stories bind together the past, present, and future in a way that contributes to change.



# Healing Power

Storytelling is powerful. It can be a conduit of systems change, as well as relieve suffering. When a story is told, a narrative is developed, and meaning is applied to cope with the terms of grief.



# ORIGINS

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- ❖ Restorative circles are one of the oldest forms of group process.
- ❖ First peoples and indigenous cultures continue to use circles as a means to address issues and provide justice.
- ❖ Sometimes referred to as a “peace” circle or “talking” circle.
- ❖ They have gained popularity in the past few decades and have become a way of life for many school communities.





Where they occur

Whether told in a restorative  
circle, or in written narrative,  
storytelling is a means to target  
bereavement in the aftermath of  
loss.



# CIRCLE PROCESS

- ❖ Communicate the values of a circle process.
- ❖ Understand what a circle process is.
- ❖ Cultivate empathy and compassion.
- ❖ Support healing and restoration during and after a tragic loss.



# KEY ELEMENTS

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- ❖ Facilitator is part of the circle rather than the focal point.
- ❖ All voices are equal
- ❖ Selecting a talking piece, explanation of the process
- ❖ The circle will work through prompts that are prepared ahead of time, giving everyone the chance to share
- ❖ Shouldn't feel unsafe



# PRACTICE IN MOTION!

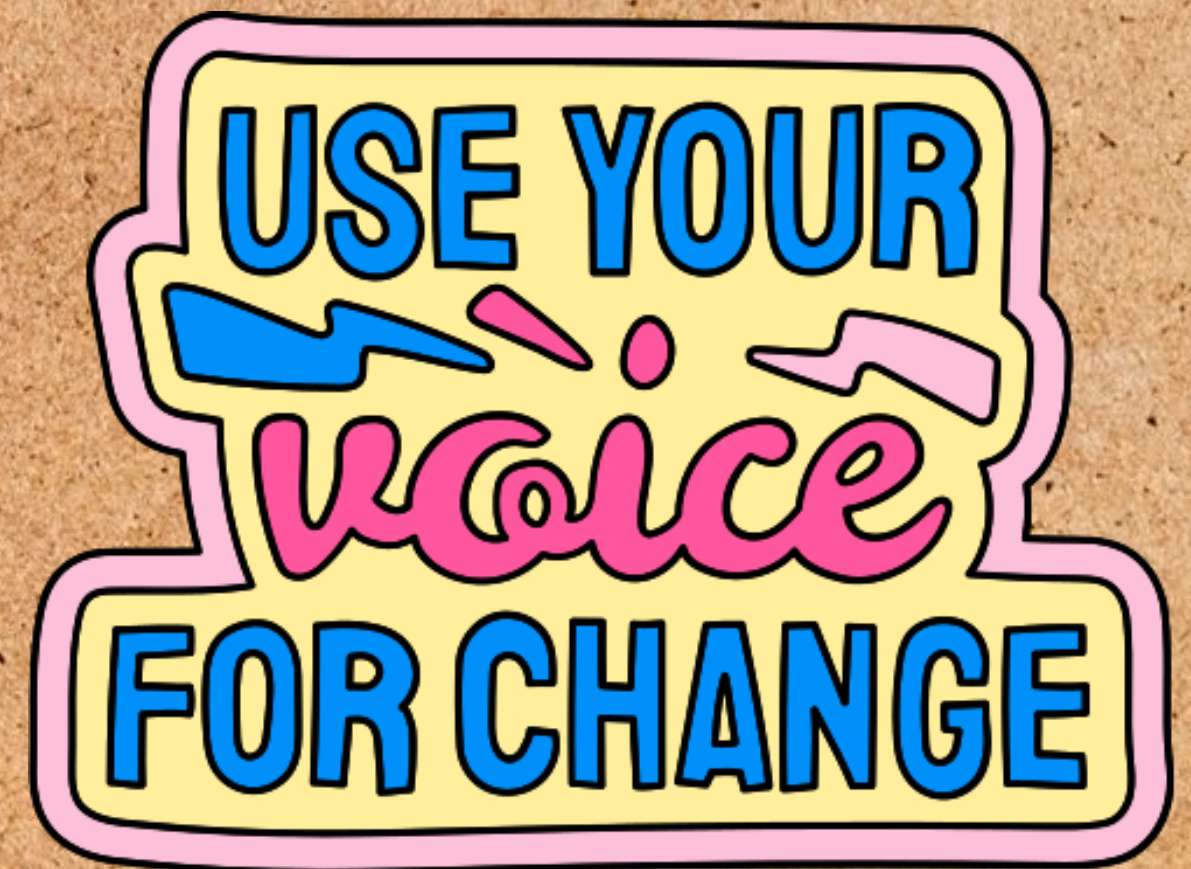
We will form ourselves into a circle and all participate in the circle process!





OUR TOPIC-

HONORING LIFE THROUGH  
STORYTELLING AND UPLIFTING  
YOUTH VOICES





# OUR TALKING PIECE





## COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

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- ❖ Speak from the heart.
- ❖ Listen with your heart.
- ❖ Speak from your own experience.
- ❖ Refrain from attempting to persuade.
- ❖ Confidentiality.
- ❖ Closing (by a designated circle keeper)



## QUESTION ROUNDS



- ❖ How has storytelling helped you cope with a sense of loss?
- ❖ What outcomes have arisen from stories being told in your life?
- ❖ How do we honor voices, both ours and that of others, through storytelling?



# CLOSING

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- Reminder about any confidentiality agreements.
- Circle keeper closes by acknowledging the efforts made during the circle. Emphasis is placed on connectivity of those involved with an overarching message of hope for the future.





# Tips for Facilitators

- ❖ **Design effective questions:** Questions should focus on feelings and impact; they should be open ended and encourage sharing
- ❖ **Manage time:** Managing time should be a shared responsibility, when opening the circle participants should be reminded of time parameters and be encouraged to make sure everyone has time to speak.
- ❖ **Put responsibility back on the group:** If there is a lull in conversation or you aren't sure where the conversation should move next, refer back to the group. If questions arise, ask the group to provide answers and share experiences.
- ❖ **Breaks:** Using breaks after difficult moments can be helpful. After returning, it may be helpful to revisit communication guidelines if appropriate.
- ❖ **Remember that you are human:** Do not feel pressure to be “perfect” or to have a “perfect” circle. If the circle provided a space for members to witness and be witnessed, it was an effective circle.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Circle Keeper's Handbook by Kay Pranis

<https://www.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/resources/stw-glenview-circles-keeper-handbook.pdf>

"Almost Everything You Wanted to Know About Grief: A Guide for Educators"

Hazleden's Lifelines Postvention

Using Story to Change Systems

Ella Saltmarshe, Stanford Social Innovation Review





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