

BRINGING PEACE TO THE RIVER:  
ESTABLISHING SUPPORT GROUPS FOR SURVIVORS OF LOSS BY SUICIDE

by

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## PERMISSION

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## **DEDICATION**

This capstone project is dedicated in loving memory to my brother, guardian angel, and eternal best friend, Eric McGauvran. Eric's death by suicide was an indescribable tragedy, and he has left a space in our family's hearts that can never be filled. I have learned and grown so much from Eric's death, but also from how he lived his life. Eric had a pure kindness and an instinctual passion for helping others that has resonated with his family, friends, community, and even strangers. His natural light that he shined continues to radiate in all who were fortunate enough to know him, and his light is what guided me and motivated me through the completion of this project.

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this scholarly project is to expand program services within a collaborating agency to establish a virtual support option for survivors of suicide loss in North Dakota and Minnesota, with an aim of reaching survivors in rural areas. Furthermore, a hopeful outcome of this project is bringing attention to the occupational impacts those who have lost a loved one face.

**Methods:** The Kawa Model was selected as the guiding theoretical framework for this project. A two-tiered literature review was conducted to examine the influence of loss by suicide on occupational engagement in daily life. The review revealed limitations in available evidence on virtual-based support groups and the influence of COVID-19 on the grief experience (Gentry et al., 2019; Stroebe & Schut, 2020; Weaver et al., 2021). The evidence that was available indicates that opportunities for support for survivors of suicide loss may help enhance the quality of life for survivors of suicide loss (Dixon, 2021; Gentry et al., 2019; M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Ross, Kølves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Weaver et al., 2021; Whittingham & Martin, 2020). This evidence along with a needs assessment on a collaborating program, Together we Educate About the Realities of Suicide (TEARS), led to the identification of a need for a virtual support group to expand access for survivors of suicide loss in rural areas.

**Results:** Following the literature review and needs assessment, a virtual support group for survivors of suicide loss was established and facilitated by the occupational therapy student. Additionally, a product was created to serve as a kit for facilitators of support groups for survivors of suicide loss, primarily in a virtual context.

**Conclusions:** The creation of virtual support groups can have a positive influence on the lives of survivors of suicide loss by helping them enhance their personal resources, protect themselves against complicated grief responses, and expand their perceived system of support. Occupational therapists have a unique set of skills and knowledge that would make them a potent team member in the future with more research.

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

In 2018, 19.6 of every 100,000 North Dakota residents died by suicide, 32.4% higher than the national average (America's Health Rankings, 2020). 14.8 of every 100,000 Minnesotans died by suicide in 2019 (America's Health Rankings, n.d.). With each of these deaths, there are family members, friends, and communities who are affected, and many become survivors of loss by suicide and are left to grieve this often-traumatic death. In rural areas of North Dakota and regional areas of Minnesota, these survivors need to travel long distances to access peer support services (M. Neumann, personal communication, June 1, 2021). Topics of interest regarding these circumstances were identified and guided the literature review conducted in Chapter II. These topics included the impact of support groups and the virtual setting, as well as the use of the Kawa Model when collaborating with all stakeholders involved.

The purpose of this scholarly project was to develop a virtual support group to serve as an accessible resource for persons in rural communities who have lost a loved one to suicide. This project will be done through a non-profit organization called Together we Educate About the Realities of Suicide (TEARS). Promotion of this virtual support group option will take place in regions connected to the TEARS's' parent organization, Altru Health Systems, but anyone interested within North Dakota and Minnesota may attend. An estimated 135 people on average are affected by each suicide (Cerel et al., 2018). With the prevalent rate of suicide in North Dakota and Minnesota, a prevalent number of survivors who would benefit from support services can also be expected.

The overarching goal for the experiential portion of the doctoral capstone project is to gain experience in the variety of tasks involved in establishing, conducting, and sustaining a program,



while collaborating with stakeholders and maintaining the mission and values of the participating program, TEARS, which is housed by Altru Health Systems. Objectives set to promote progression towards this goal included: completing a needs assessment of TEARS; identifying communities that would benefit from the program developed; searching for agencies to serve as stakeholders within the identified communities; developing promotional materials on the agency and program purpose to distribute to potential stakeholders; develop promotional materials for the program; communicating with stakeholders regarding details of the support group developed as they are established; disseminating promotional materials; connecting directly with community members who may benefit from the support group; facilitating at least three support group meetings (including mock facilitation session(s) in advance for practice); and completing and distributing a sustainability plan to the primary participating agency.

The Kawa Model was used as the guiding theoretical framework of the capstone project. ‘Kawa’ is a Japanese word that translates to ‘river,’ which is the metaphorical center of the Kawa Model (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). One’s life is seen as a river, which is constantly facing internal and external changes as it moves from its starting to end point, as one’s life constantly changes from birth to death. There are five components to this model: river flow, rocks, driftwood, riverbanks, and space (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). River flow is most associated with one’s life and their priorities (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Rocks are the barriers or challenges one faces, which serve to block the river’s flow and, in turn, one’s engagement in life (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Driftwood includes personal characteristics, values, beliefs, etc. (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Driftwood can either be supportive of the river’s flow and float along the top of the river, but driftwood can also be inhibiting and work alongside rocks to block the river’s flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Riverbanks are the contextual factors, specifically the social and physical

environment (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Finally, spaces are found between the rocks, driftwood, and riverbanks, and these spaces are what allows the river to flow freely (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Intervention through the lens of the Kawa Model often involves finding ways to enhance the spaces to facilitate the river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). The Kawa Model was selected for its applicability across cultures and professions and its holistic responsiveness to changes in life circumstances (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

This project was not completed in a direct occupational therapy setting, instead in a non-profit organization offering volunteer peer-facilitated support services. However, through using an occupational therapy lens throughout the capstone experience, insights into occupational therapy's potential role in grief have been revealed. A subsequent goal of this scholarly project was to raise awareness of the disruption grief has on occupational engagement. Furthermore, a hope is for this increased awareness to eventually expand the scope of practice for occupational therapy to include the bereaved population.

Chapter I Introduction was composed of an overview of the prevalence of survivors of suicide loss, the purpose of this capstone project, the goals associated with the capstone experience, an introduction to the theoretical framework, and a description of how occupational therapy perspectives were integrated into the project. Chapter II Literature Review consists of themes found in the available evidence through the lens of the Kawa Model.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

The Chapter II Literature Review consists of a review of evidence related to grief, survivors of loss by suicide, support groups, use of a virtual setting for support services, and the use of the Kawa Model. The evidence was viewed and organized through the lens of the Kawa Model. The Kawa Model, in viewing one's life as a river that is constantly fluctuating as influencing factors shift (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). These influencing factors include driftwood (personal factors, such as personality traits, values, or beliefs that may serve as assets or liabilities), rocks (barriers that inhibit the river's flow), and riverbanks (contextual factors that either widens to support the river's flow or narrows to confine the river's flow) (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022b, para. 1), suicide is defined as "death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die." With each suicide, an estimated 135 people are affected and, therefore, facing exceptional disruptions to their river's flow (Cerel et al., 2018; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

#### **River flow**

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), in North Dakota and Minnesota, 147 and 739 residents died by suicide in 2020, respectively, leaving up to 119, 610 with affected river flows (AFSP, n.d.a, n.d.b; Cerel et al., 2018; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). In 2018, Native Americans and Alaska Natives had the national highest rate of suicides per 100,000 people, followed by Caucasian Americans (State Health Access Data Assistance Center, 2020). With all losses add changes in support, roles, and identity (Dixon, 2021; Weis et al., 2019). Suicide in particular is a traumatic loss that puts the bereaved at risk for a more turbulent river flow, resulting from impacted driftwood, rocks, and riverbanks (Alioto et al., 2020a; Dixon,

2021; Kőlves et al., 2019; Milman et al., 2019; Ross, Kőlves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## **Driftwood**

### **Frameworks**

Researchers have developed various theoretical frameworks that may be used as resources for those experiencing grief. As characteristic of driftwood, these resources have benefits, but must also be used with caution to avoid limiting the river's flow (Corr, 2021; Dixon, 2021; Momentous Institute, 2021; Strada, 2016; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). For instance, Corr (2021) reviewed the well-known stages of grief created by Elisabeth Kőbler-Ross (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance), which were initially created as expectations for those learning that they are dying. Corr (2021) referred to criticism of the stages, in which many note that the stages are too generalizing and assume a linear progression for every grieving person. The Momentous Institute (2021) published an article similarly addressing a hypothesis included in Dr. J. William Worden's book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* (2018). With this hypothesis, Worden (2018) detailed how every grieving person needs to achieve four tasks to facilitate healing from grief. The authors pointed out that these tasks are not necessarily meant to be used as a professional intervention; instead, the tasks can be identified as natural responses that may be beneficial in promoting healing after loss (Momentous Institute, 2021). The most appropriate use of frameworks to support bereaved individuals can be summarized by the following quotation by Strada (2016, p. 312), which emphasized the need to examine individual responses to grief to create an optimal river flow: "the main goal of grief and bereavement care is to support the individual's unique and personal grieving process without a preconceived notion of how that process should present or develop" (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## **Reactions**

An important theme throughout the literature is that one's grief experience is dependent on their individual reactions to grief (Corr, 2021, Dixon, 2021; Kølves et al., 2019; Milman et al., 2019; Strada, 2016). Whether or not certain reactions to grief occur are dependent on each person's experience and personal factors, which may contribute positively or negatively to their immediate and future river flow while processing their loss (Corr, 2021; Dixon, 2021; Kølves et al., 2019; Milman et al., 2019; Strada, 2016; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Some personal characteristics may lead to reactions that are facilitative of the flowing river, such as the development of healthy coping skills, expressing emotions, and being able to accept, process, and adjust to the loss (Corr, 2021; Dixon, 2021, Momentous Institute, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Other characteristics may lead to a reaction that instead takes the form of driftwood assisting the rocks in blocking the river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Examples of these influential characteristics would be having anxious or avoidant attachments, neuroticism, and being exposed to a traumatic loss (Dixon, 2021; Milman et al., 2019). In addition, grief may be accompanied by impaired physical and cognitive abilities (Dixon, 2021). Both positive and negative factors may influence the driftwood, but how the driftwood interacts with the river can only be determined by examining each person individually (Corr, 2021, Dixon, 2021, Kølves et al., 2019; Milman et al., 2019; Strada, 2016, Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Weis et al., 2019).

## **Spirituality and Cultural Influences**

Many of the values and characteristics that take the form of driftwood evolve in part from a person's culture and social background (Alioto et al., 2020b; Heisler & Safranski, 2018; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Wallace, 2018). Driftwood may take the form of one's spiritual and cultural beliefs, view of death and grief, and, as discussed, what meaning they make from their loss

(Alioto et al., 2020b; Heisler & Safranski, 2018; Milman et al., 2019; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Wallace, 2018). These cultural influences and more affect how each person, family unit, and community respond to the loss, which may be positive or negative (Alioto et al., 2020b; Heisler & Safranski, 2018; Milman et al., 2019; Wallace, 2018). As with the reactions that one may have with grief, one's spirituality may be facilitative or inhibitive of the river's flow when challenged by the loss of a loved one (Dixon, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). The loss may lead to intense emotions and questions that disrupts one's relationship with their spiritual beliefs, while others may find comfort and answers in their spiritual foundations (Dixon, 2021). Either way, it is necessary to address how one's values and beliefs guide their comprehension of their loss to gain a full understanding of the influence of their driftwood with other components of the river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## **Rocks**

### **Limitations in Literature**

A considerable amount of research was dedicated to the efficacy and development of support groups. According to the Mayo Clinic (2020, paras. 1-2), “[s]upport groups bring together people who are going through or have gone through similar experiences... A support group provides an opportunity for people to share personal experiences and feelings.” The overarching examination of developing virtual peer support groups for those who have lost a loved one by suicide encompasses many subtopics, such as techniques for improved privacy and comfort, perceptions of group members, and interventions that can be used within the virtual setting. One challenge threaded throughout the research that has been done within these subtopics is the limitation of available evidence (Andriessen et al., 2019; Gentry et al., 2019; Stroebe & Schut, 2020; Weaver et al., 2021). Specifically, evidence on the efficiency of

interventions with consideration of certain variables was sparse; in turn, access to resources supported by evidence may be limited as well (Andriessen et al., 2019; Gentry et al., 2019; Stroebe & Schut, 2020; Weaver et al., 2021). According to grief professional Gina Dixon (2021), survivors of suicide loss are more at risk for developing complicated responses to grief. Andriessen et al. (2019) found that there is still limited evidence supporting interventions for those who are experiencing complicated or other divergent responses to grief. There were distinct gaps in rigorous available literature for virtual support groups and for the grief experience during COVID-19 (Gentry et al., 2019; Stroebe & Schut, 2020; Weaver et al., 2021). Finally, Heisler and Safranski (2018) reviewed literature and noticed a gap in literature on preventative mental health programs for Native American youths, who are the most at risk for suicide (America's Health Rankings, 2020).

### **Complicated Grief and Trauma**

In the case of bereavement by suicide, those who are bereaved are at a heightened risk for developing divergent grief experiences (Dixon, 2021; Milman et al., 2019). Prolonged grief disorder (PGD), also referred to as complicated grief, is a diagnosis made at least six months after a loss in which a bereaved individual “[experiences] uniquely elevated and chronic levels of impairment and distress” as a result of their loss (Milman et al., 2019, p. 715). Those with PGD are preoccupied with their loss and memories related to the loss and their loved one, which can result in either positive or negative emotions (Alioto et al., 2020a). The severity of PGD in turn causes dysfunction to the bereaved, thus, inhibiting their river's flow (Alioto et al., 2020a; Dixon, 2021; Milman et al., 2019; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). According to a training on facilitating support groups for bereaved populations (Dixon, 2021), those exposed to loss by suicide are at a heightened risk for developing divergent grief experiences in part due to suicide being a type of

traumatic loss. Further, trauma differs from grief in the duration of its symptoms, the presence of survivor's guilt, and escalated intrusive thoughts, all of which may inhibit the person's ability to grieve and, therefore, contribute to the formation of rocks (Dixon, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

### **The Impact of COVID-19**

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019 and is still ongoing as this scholarly project was created in 2022 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022a). As of April 2022, over 985,000 people have died in the United States alone (John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2022). With the risk of the pandemic, there was an extraordinary shift in work, education, healthcare, and more from being in-person to now being virtual, which in part instigated the need for a virtual support group within the TEARS program (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022). Everyone in areas that have been impacted by COVID-19 in some form or another has experienced grief during COVID-19, whether from the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the loss of other important aspects of their life (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020). For those who are additionally grieving the loss of a loved one, grief from the pandemic builds onto the already existing rocks in their river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Expert insight and themes indicate that COVID-19 factors can be associated with increasing mental health challenges and complications for grief (Alioto et al., 2020a; Stroebe & Schutt, 2020). The focus on COVID-19 may cause some grieving individuals to not move on from their grief and instead distract themselves with the current events (Stroebe & Schutt, 2020). As an additional challenge resulting from COVID-19, many support groups postponed or ended their meetings for safety, in part due to limited evidence on the feasibility and perceptions of virtual support groups (Weaver et al., 2021). Other support groups moved to a virtual platform; however, with this



move comes a more inherent risk in which privacy is not easily maintained (Whittingham & Martin, 2020).

## **Riverbanks**

### **Support Groups and the Virtual Context**

In 2020, just under half of North Dakotans and just over one-fifth of Minnesotans live in rural areas (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021, Rural Health Information Hub, 2022).

Residents of rural areas often need to travel to reach resources, a task that could be impeded by weather conditions, distance to appropriate resources, etc. (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022). Virtual support groups are a solution to benefit rural residents (Gentry et al., 2019; M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Weaver et al., 2021). Access to support groups is important to decrease social isolation that may be experienced by those bereaved by suicide, as well as to allow them to connect with others who have had similar experiences (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021). Virtual support groups have been shown to be largely accepted and have positive perceptions by participants in a variety of studies, although the preference between face-to-face or virtual groups varies for each person (Gentry et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 2021). Participants in a study by Weaver et al., (2021) noted that the technology aspect was easy to navigate, and it served as an appropriate setting for the bereavement support group. Group members felt that they were able to fully express themselves, and the conversations flowed naturally, with verbal and nonverbal communication. These positive perspectives endorse virtual support groups as contributions to widened riverbanks (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## **Community**

A paramount part of one's social riverbanks is their community (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). One's perception of their relationship with their community members can be altered after a loss by suicide, and their perception may in turn widen or narrow the riverbanks (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Ross, Kõlves, and De Leo (2021) conducted a qualitative study to understand the experiences of survivors of loss by suicide, as well as to identify the support needs, by conducting focus groups. From these focus groups, themes of stigma, social isolation, and wanting to connect with others were revealed (Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021). These negative consequences hinder one's river flow and potentially contribute to the development of rocks (Alioto et al., 2020a; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Having a strong sense of meaningful connections and support from one's community can instead widen riverbanks (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Communities can be from people within their physical region or local organizations, but communities based on mutual strengthening and shared experiences can also be created through participation in support groups (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020).

### **Space for Enhancing River Flow**

#### **Evolving Healthcare and Community Support**

Fortunately, more research and actions are taking place to enhance the support available for survivors of suicide loss as awareness of the need for grief services and virtual options increases. Leitao et al. (2021) examined the efficacy of a training program for professionals for improving the care of parents bereaved by neonatal loss. This training was shown to result in improved self-perception of the professionals in dealing with the difficult circumstances of grief, which shows that hosting workshops to navigate these circumstances could in turn improve the experience of the bereaved in professional settings (Leitao et al., 2021). Other presentations and

trainings on developing the skills and understanding to work with someone who has been bereaved are virtually accessible (Dixon, 2021; Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020). Additionally, incorporating the Kawa Model has potential to enhance river flows from an individual to organizational level by teaching team members how to analyze each component and find spaces for change (Lape & Scaife, 2017; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). By improving the resources and skills of those serving bereaved persons, positive driftwood may be added to the bereaved person's river, and rocks could be shifted or minimized to allow more room for the river to flow (Lape & Scaife, 2017; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

Another space for growth in terms of support is enriching the sense of community, which would in turn open the riverbanks and facilitate a smooth river flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Eliminating the stigma attached to suicide is a crucial step in decreasing social isolation of survivors of suicide loss and creating a community that the survivor feels safe grieving in (Ross, Kølves, & De Leo, 2021). Simply having someone show that they are present and willing to listen can be facilitative of coping with grief and building an improved sense of support to widen one's riverbanks (Dixon, 2021; Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Finally, having consistent support from a person or support group can allow a person to share their grief, address the barriers inhibiting their river's flow, and feel a deeper sense of connection with others (Dixon, 2021; Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Hearing about the experiences of others may also instigate closer reflection in their own grief experience, which could promote further processing and understanding of the loss's impact on their river (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). While more research is needed regarding virtual support groups, the research that has been done has shown positive perceptions from those involved (Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020)

## **Continuing Bonds**

While the loved one who was lost to suicide is no longer physically present, the concept of continuing bonds may help create enough space to return some of the river's flow (Hoppes & Segal, 2010; Momentous Institute, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). By continuing to maintain the bond shared with the loved one, one can maintain the meaning and motivation behind their engagement in occupations that were shared with or influenced by the lost loved one (Hoppes & Segal, 2010). Being able to keep the bond with the loved one while moving forward is thought to be a natural response to grief (Momentous Institute). Maintaining this bond while making meaning of the loss may be beneficial in promoting healing after loss and finding a new path for the river to flow (Hoppes & Segal, 2010; Milman et al., 2019; Momentous Institute, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## **Summary**

The loss of a loved one to suicide is accompanied by substantial changes to the survivors' rivers (Dixon, 2021; Kõlves et al., 2019; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). The full extent of how these changes impact rivers is determined by examining each person's driftwood through their resources, personal characteristics, and values; the existence of any rocks that may be added or strengthened as a result of the loss; and the support or lack thereof that exists and is accessible within their riverbanks (Alioto et al., 2020a, 2020b; Corr, 2021; Dixon, 2021; Heisler & Safranski, 2018; Milman et al., 2019; Momentous Institute, 2021; Mountain Plains MHTTC, 2020; M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Strada, 2016; Stroebe & Schutt, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Wallace, 2018; Weis et al., 2019). Given the lack of accessible support services for rural North Dakotans and Minnesotans, as well as the need for virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for the

establishment of a virtual support group (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022). Through the creation of virtual-based support groups, rural survivors of suicide loss will be able to expand their resources and sources of personal strengths, address the rocks that are blocking their river's flow, and find a sense of community with others who share similar circumstances (Dixon, 2021; Gentry et al., 2019; Mountain Plains MHTTC; M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Ross, Kølves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Weaver et al., 2021; Whittingham & Martin, 2020). The accompanying product shown in Chapter IV is meant to ease development of other support programs to contribute to facilitate survivors of suicide loss in moving towards more tranquil rivers (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

Chapter II included a review of the themes discovered through the literature. Chapter III consists of a detailed review of the methods involved from the conceptualization of the capstone project to the creation of the product.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

Chapter III Methodology consists of a description the conceptualization of the capstone project and a needs assessment, an outline of the experiential placement and associated tasks, ethical considerations, and the creation, purpose, and use of the product.

#### **Conceptualization and Needs Assessment**

This scholarly project was conceptualized as I reflected on my own experience of loss by suicide and the occupational impacts that followed. After researching potential agencies with which to collaborate, I connected with a local program called Together we Educate About the Realities of Suicide (TEARS). TEARS aims to educate the local community and surrounding areas on suicide and provide support for survivors of suicide loss, and the TEARS's coordinator (the Site Mentor) expressed a need to expand support services onto a virtual level for survivors across Minnesota and North Dakota. The purpose of this scholarly project is therefore to create a virtual support group for survivors of suicide loss and raise awareness of the group to reach all who may benefit. While program development was the primary approach for this scholarly project, advocacy was also used to promote awareness and access for other survivors to support services. The Kawa Model was selected as the theoretical framework for its view of one's life as constantly fluctuating, its relevance across cultures, and its ability to be used inter-professionally (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

A needs assessment was conducted using a two-tiered literature review approach between the summer and fall of 2021. Resources and research on grief in general was included, with a preference for loss by suicide. Articles published since 2016 were included, with an exception being made for one article on the role of occupational therapy after the death of a loved one

(Hoppes & Segal, 2010) due to the limited information within the topic area. Combinations of the following search terms were used: *virtual, grief, bereavement, loss, suicide, program development, occupational therapy, intervention, rural, model, grief, Kawa Model, support group, spirituality, and Native American*. Through the University of North Dakota's School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the following databases were accessed: CINAHL, Google Scholar, and the American Journal of Occupational Therapy.

TEARS was selected as a potential site for the doctoral experiential placement (DEP), as its purpose related to providing support for survivors of suicide loss. TEARS is housed within a larger, hospital-based agency, Altru Health Systems. Approximately 6 months before the DEP began (July 2021), a partial, informal needs assessment was conducted with the TEARS coordinator, who noted that the TEARS committee has discussed the need to expand services to reach survivors in rural areas of North Dakota and Minnesota through the creation of a virtual support group. An in-person support group for survivors of suicide loss is available through TEARS, but with the lengthy distance between small towns of the two states, this in-person option is not easily accessible for everyone seeking support. A more in-depth needs assessment for TEARS was conducted in-person and resulted in a narrowing down of specific regions of North Dakota and Minnesota, as well as Indigenous reservations (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022).

### **Outline of Experiential Tasks**

After Altru's TEARS program was confirmed to be the DEP site, a memorandum of understanding was written and agreed upon by the Site Mentor, the Faculty Mentor, the Experiential Coordinator, and myself. Weeks one through seven were outlined in the memorandum of understanding to focus on the initial development of the identified program

through the scholarly project. This included completed a full needs assessment, completing an orientation at the Site, attending committee meetings for TEARS at large, observing the in-person support group that is already in place, and reviewing class resources on program development, developing and distributing promotional materials, and facilitating group meetings. Resources from a previous training on facilitating grief groups were also to be reviewed during this time. I completed training required by Altru for student placements prior to the start of the DEP. I then created promotional and informational materials while researching local agencies to distribute materials and present to. A social media initiative was also created to promote the group and completed an interview with a prominent local newspaper to raise awareness in regional communities about the services available through TEARS (see Appendix A). I connected with individuals from more than fifty-five hospitals, clinics, and mental health agencies; thirty-four funeral homes and churches; and seven college counseling centers in North Dakota and Minnesota to inform them about TEARS and provide presentations as needed to raise awareness of TEARS's services as needed to serve their community members. I hung up flyers in over twenty five convenience stores and seven public libraries to further raise awareness to community members. Before and during the DEP, I attended a number of trainings and conferences to learn about establishing and facilitating groups, which contributed to the development of the promotional, intake, and facilitative processes of the group.

Weeks eight through fourteen were outlined in accordance with the expected experiential tasks to be achieved as the program begins to be conducted. I would continue to find ways to connect with community members who may benefit from the support group, while facilitating support group sessions. I wrote three group protocols to guide the facilitated sessions. I



collaborated with the Site Mentor, group members, and other stakeholders to identify and implement any necessary changes to improve satisfaction and efficiency of groups.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitive nature of losing a loved one and the unique challenges that may occur with a virtual setting, there were multiple ethical considerations that needed to take place. Some considerations arose from past experience, research, and discussion with other support group facilitators (Dixon, 2021; M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Resnick, 2022). The primary ethical concerns came with the virtual context of the support groups. Precautionary steps were put in place based on the expertise and experience of grief and group facilitators. In addition, I attended one of TEARS's in-person support group sessions and noted concerns that group members stated they would have with the virtual context. These precautionary actions included setting a maximum number of participants, establishing a secure intake process, and outlining back-up plans in case too many participants were to attend a session. Furthermore, to enhance confidentiality, I researched how privacy is maintained among virtual platforms and again considered the advice of experienced facilitators when writing group guidelines to encourage confidentiality. These strategies were integrated into the creation of the final product's group guidelines, as well as in an additional document specifically providing strategies for enhancing comfort and privacy in the virtual context, also included in the final product.

Chapter III consisted of a description of the steps taken to create the capstone project, including conceptualization, needs assessment, outline of the involved experiential tasks, and ethical considerations. Chapter IV includes a description of the resulting product and the results of the capstone project.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Product**

Chapter III Methodology encompassed a description of the conceptualization of the capstone project and a needs assessment, an outline of the experiential placement and associated tasks, and ethical considerations. Chapter IV includes a description of the product (see Appendix C for full product), along with the results of the project and the associated product.

### **Product**

The product including promotional materials, informational materials for group participants, intake forms, group protocols, a survey, and a sustainability plan was created for use as a resource by other virtual support groups being established. Sample promotional and informational materials were included in the product to support group creators in raising awareness of their resource as driftwood that bereaved persons can add to their river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). To design promotional and informational materials, considerations for reading ease were used, including the use of bold print or underlining for takeaway points, a minimum of size 12 font, concise phrasing, and plenty of white space (Bastable et al., 2020).

Informational materials for group members included group guidelines, a tentative meeting outline, and suggestions for creating an optimal use of the virtual setting, all of which were intended to support group members in knowing what they can expect from the group as a new potential part of their riverbanks and were suggested by other group facilitators (M. Neumann, personal communication, 2022; Resnick, 2022; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Additionally, a brief introduction into setting up and using the selected virtual platform (Microsoft Teams, which is not affiliated with the myself or the TEARS program) was created and sent to group members to guide them in adapting to the specific virtual context.

The intake process was conducted similarly to the TEARS's in-person group, but formal documents were created for future use. Intake forms were created with consideration of suggestions from other survivor of suicide loss support groups (Resnick, 2022). First, an intake form was sent to group members to complete regarding general contact information, who they lost, and their access to internet for attending the virtual group. After this form was completed, group members were reached out to for a brief intake conversation, which was also included in the product. The purpose of the intake conversation is to learn more about the potential group member and allow the group member to ask address any concerns they have about the support group prior to attending to reduce any perceived rocks that could inhibit their participation in the group (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

For ease in facilitating the groups, three group protocols were created using Cole's Seven Steps and added to the product. The first protocol encouraged individual and group goal setting. The second protocol introduced the Kawa Model to participants and guided participants in drawing and analyzing their own rivers (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). The third group protocol focused on the concept of continuing bonds, which includes the discussion of how occupations have changed since the loss. Objectives were set using Bloom's Taxonomy and were included with the group protocols (Bastable & Rabbia, 2020). The objectives were then used as measurements of success alongside skilled observation of performance in the activity and discussion to determine efficacy of the protocols, along with feedback from participants (Worral & Sopczyk, 2020). Additionally, a brief survey for group participants on their perception of the group in relation to the Kawa Model was created and included in the product. Finally, a sustainability plan for the facilitation, promotion, and organization of the virtual program was created for the open group to continue past the conclusion of the DEP.

## **Results**

Nine people expressed interest in participating in the group, and six people went through the formal intake process. The three people who expressed interest but did not undergo the intake process had not continued with the intake process due to the following reasons: not having a loved one pass away to suicide (instead having a loved one survive a suicide attempt); not feeling that the group was an appropriate fit for their grief at this time; and not responding to follow-up emails. Alternative resources were provided to those who had responded explaining their reason for not continuing with the intake process. Of the six people who went through the intake process, four attended the virtual groups. All four group members returned after their first meetings and, thus, attended at least two of the three meetings held during the capstone period.

There was one response to the Kawa-based survey that was distributed to group participants, which provided feedback to be used for future facilitation of the group. The survey result and informal feedback from participants were positive. Participation levels, the flow of discussion (or lack thereof), and participants' reflective comments made during the group meetings were used as informal feedback. The positive reception and retainment of those who participated in the groups indicate that having access to support services in the virtual context is of benefit for survivors of suicide loss.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary**

Chapter V Summary includes a conclusion to the scholarly project. The components are an analysis through the lens of the Kawa Model, implications for occupational therapy, limitations, recommendations, and a conclusion.

#### **Analysis Through the Kawa Model**

Suicide ends the life of nearly 800,000 people each year worldwide (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, n.d.). With each loss leaving an estimated 135 people affected, that number expands to millions of people being newly exposed to suicide each year, on top of the millions existing who had already experienced a loss (Cerel et al., 2018, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, n.d.). Persons who experience loss by suicide face the risk of changes to their roles, identity, and engagement in life, and there is as a result a need for accessible support services (Dixon, 2021; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Weis et al., 2019). Grief frameworks, spirituality, and culture are influences that have the potential to become either supportive or inhibitive driftwood (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Additionally, each person's unique response to their grief has the potential to either support them in navigating their new river flow, or their responses to their experience could result in a driftwood that helps block the river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Furthermore, given the trauma and stigma that often accompanies suicides, complicated grief may occur, which forms a significant rock blocking their ability to reach calm river flows (Dixon, 2021; Milman et al., 2019; Ross, Kõlves, & De Leo, 2021; Teoh & Iwama, 2015). External factors of limitations in evidence and structural changes as a result of COVID-19 limit the availability and accessibility of resources to combat threats to one's river (Andriessen et al., 2019; Gentry et al., 2019; Stroebe & Schut, 2020; Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Weaver et al., 2021;

Whittingham & Martin, 2020). Figure 1 included in Appendix B illustrates the implications for those survivors of loss by suicide based on the literature review via the Kawa Model, but it must be noted that the factors covered will not affect all survivors in the same way.

### **Implications for Occupational Therapy**

Bereavement is a circumstance that leads to disruptions to occupational engagement, yet the topic has been underdiscussed in the field of occupational therapy (Whitney, 2022). The occupational impact of bereavement includes, but is not limited to, a disruption in routine, an altered worldview that changes the meaning of the grieving person's occupations, and affected social relationships (Hoppes & Segal, 2010). Impacted social relationships include individuals with the lost loved one, their surviving family, and others within their community (Dixon, 2021; MHTTC, 2020). Although there have been some theoretical concepts developed by occupational therapists regarding the occupational impacts of grief, grief continues to be an area of occupational therapy that is minimally addressed (Hoppes & Segal, 2010; Whitney, 2022).

### **Limitations**

The creation of the group was impacted by the limited amount of evidence in support groups for bereaved persons and virtual-based support groups. Additionally, the support group was scheduled to meet every other week, so only three meetings were facilitated by the conclusion of the capstone experience. This limited the amount of experience gained to inform the development and use of the product. Finally, only one group participant completed the Kawa-based survey by the conclusion of the capstone project. This, in addition to the restricted number of meetings held, causes a challenge in drawing a well-rounded conclusion on the efficiency of the group.

### **Recommendations**

While the support group created within this project does not need to be facilitated by an occupational therapist, it is recommended that the Kawa Model continues to be used to support group members in setting goals and problem-solving the means to reach those goals to enhance their quality of life. The Kawa Model can be used by any discipline to support individuals in examining different factors of their lives and discovering ways to enhance their involvement in life; thus, the model can be used as a tool to calm one's river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Additionally, feedback should regularly be received from group participants to ensure the group contributes positively to the widen the riverbanks (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

The limitations in evidence, physical distance, and COVID-19 narrow the availability of accessible in-person support services. Lack of accessible support services results in a missed opportunity to assist survivors of suicide loss in optimizing their river and finding a new, smooth flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Creating virtual support groups allows facilitators to reach a larger number of bereaved individuals and provide them with the hope and encouragement they desire (Dixon, 2021; Ross, Kőlves, & De Leo, 2021). Further research into bereavement from an occupational therapy standpoint is necessary to establish grief in the scope of practice. Occupational therapy has a crucial understanding of how changes in one's life affects their engagement in meaningful and necessary aspects of life. Thus, by raising awareness of the benefits of occupational therapy within the realm of grief, the field can bring about actions to help bring peace to survivors' rivers (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

The occupational therapy student completed an interview about her capstone project with the *Grand Forks Herald*, published February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

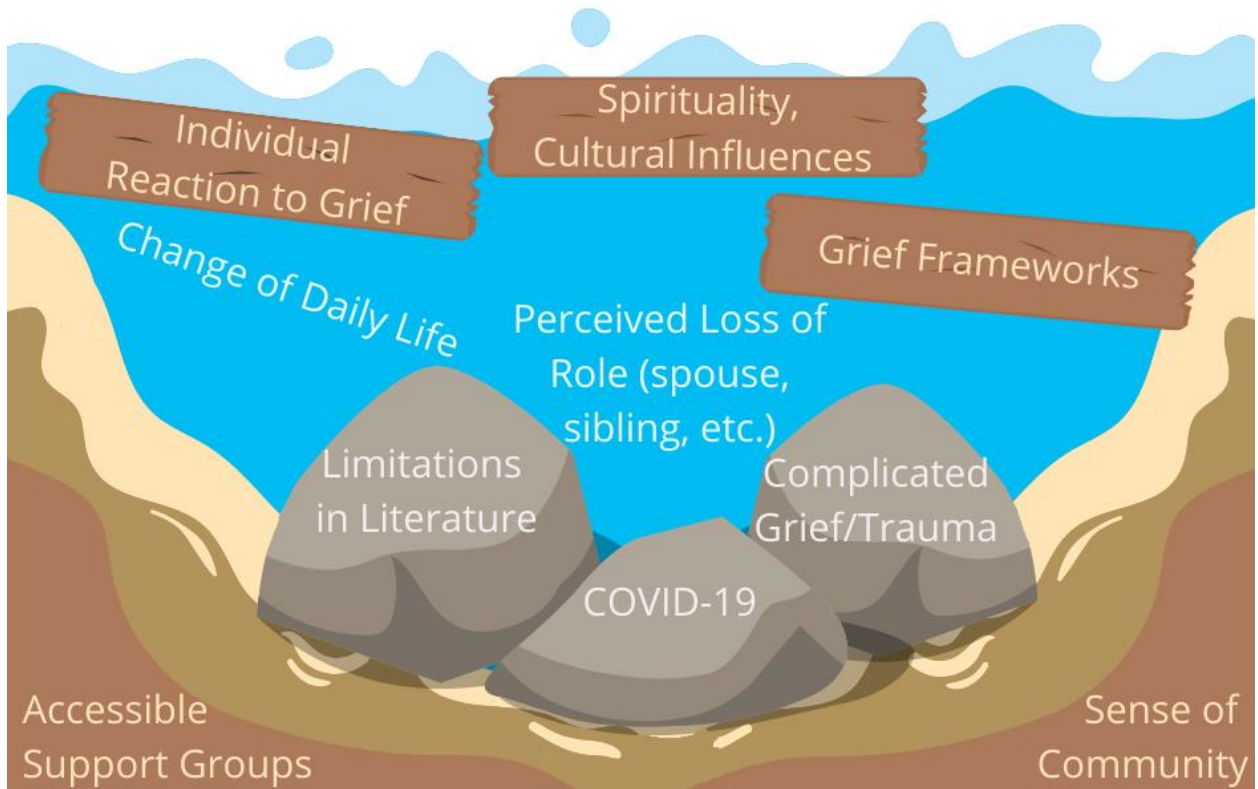
<https://www.grandforksherald.com/news/local/und-graduate-student-helps-bring-suicide-support-group-online>



## Appendix B

**Figure 1**

*Influences on Rivers of Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Kawa Perspective*



## Appendix C

# Bringing Peace to the River:

*A Kit for Creating Virtual Support Groups  
for Survivors of Suicide Loss*



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# Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (2021), over 700,000 people die by suicide every year, which results in millions of people being affected by suicide. Themes among survivors of suicide loss identified by Ross, Kőlves, and De Leo (2021) include a desire to connect with others and having opportunities to process the stigma they have experienced. The presence of COVID-19 and limitations in rural resources are among some of the barriers for survivors accessing these opportunities to process with others. From these barriers comes a need for access to virtual support group options.

This product is a kit intended to support either peer or professional facilitators in establishing virtual support groups for survivors of suicide loss. The content of this kit may be used, or facilitators may choose to use the materials as a point of reference when creating their own materials. Materials include examples of information to provide for group members, forms for the member intake process, samples of promotional and educational materials, and group protocols that may be used to guide three sessions. Information for group members includes an overview of the group, group guidelines, a tentative schedule of group sessions, tips for maintaining their comfort and privacy in the virtual setting, and a brief introduction to using Microsoft Teams, as this was the virtual platform selected for this product (however, neither TEARS nor this product is affiliated with Microsoft Teams). A sustainability plan for a support group was included for reference as well. The Kawa Model was as the theoretical background to guide the development of this product, specifically for its applicability across professions, cultures, and experiences (Lape & Scaife, 2017; Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

*All images included in this product were of personal use, taken or created by the author.*

# The Kawa Model

The Kawa Model views one's life as a river and can be used by facilitators and participants to understand how their grief has influenced their life (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Each experience one has results in shifts in their river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

## Components of the Kawa Model are as follows:

*River flow*- one's life, priorities, and participation in meaningful experiences and activities (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Rocks*- barriers of obstacles that inhibit the river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

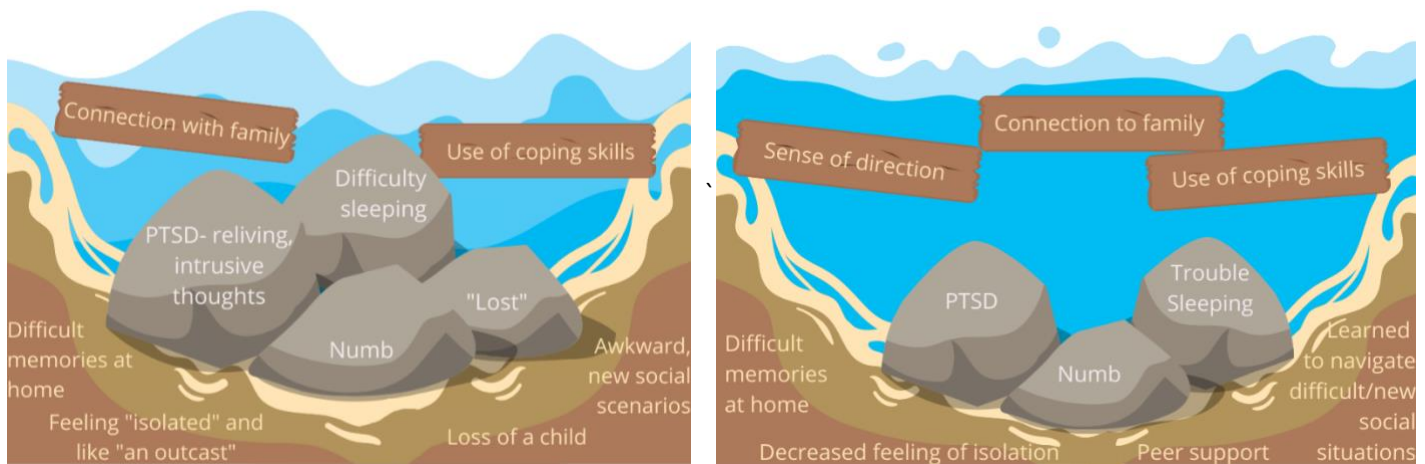
*Driftwood*- personal and cultural traits, values, and beliefs that either support the river's flow (floats to the top) or helps the rocks in blocking the river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Riverbanks*- physical and social environments (home, family, community, etc.) (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Spaces*- areas between the rocks, driftwood, and riverbanks that allow the river to flow freely (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

## Kawa Case Example

To illustrate the influence the support group may have on participants, a Kawa-led interview of a participant of an in-person support group for survivors of suicide loss was conducted using guiding questions created by Teoh & Iwama (2015). The interview questions were asked twice, once with the interviewee being asked to answer as they would immediately after their loss (*left image*), and once with the interviewee being asked to answer as they would now after being involved in the support group (*right image*). Two resulting Kawa diagrams were drawn with confirmation from the interviewee that the information they had provided was accurately displayed.



### Analysis:

*River flow*- waters started as very rough and turbulent, then transitioned to waters that are choppy but flowing more smoothly in comparison (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Rocks*- barriers decreased in size/severity, and one barrier of feeling "lost" disappeared entirely (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Driftwood*- another driftwood was added, and all driftwood are facilitating river's flow by floating along the top of the river (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Riverbanks*- started very narrowed, limiting the space available for the river to flow. Eventually widened allowing plenty of space between rocks and driftwood and facilitating the river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

*Spaces*- by building peer support into the riverbanks and the removal of a rock through an increased sense of direction, more space resulted, leading to a better life flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

## Virtual Support Group Overview

- **To whom is this group open?** The support groups are open to North Dakota and Minnesota residents who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide (regardless of relation, time since loss, etc.).
- **How many people can attend?** Efforts will be made to keep the group size under 15 to allow space and time for as many people to share as they need.
- **When does the group take place?** The virtual support meetings will be held on the 2nd Monday and 4th Tuesday of each month. Meetings will be held from 7-8:30pm CT. Members are welcome to attend one meeting or both as allowed by their schedule.
- **How can you join?** To ensure a safe and confidential group, anyone interested is asked to complete a simple intake process. Then, the meeting link and other group information will be sent directly to the participant.
- **How is privacy maintained?** All participants will go through an intake process and receive the link to meetings directly. Links are not to be shared with anyone else. If you cannot be in a room by yourself, you are asked to wear headphones and position your screen so that others in the room are not able to see other group participants.
- **What can you expect from the group?** All meetings will start with a brief review of the group guidelines and introductions. You are NOT required to speak; you can feel free to observe and have the camera on or off as you prefer. A topic may be introduced at the beginning for a portion of the group time. The rest of the time will be allotted to sharing amongst group members on any current issue they are facing, experiences they have had, etc. Group members are encouraged to respond and engage in conversations with their fellow participants. Given the virtual setting, the chat feature may be used as well if preferred for questions or comments.



## Group Guidelines

- Everything shared within the group is confidential and must not be shared outside of the group.
- The Teams meeting links are sent only to people who have gone through the intake process. These links should not be shared with anyone.
- Please text or email your facilitator if you need to sign off early for any reason.
- The emotions and beliefs of each group member will be respected.
- Please be mindful of your time when sharing to make sure everyone has a chance to respond or share as well.
- If the group and a group member do not appear to be an appropriate fit, the group member may be offered other resources that may be more suitable for the person's needs at that point.
- Potentially triggering topics may be redirected through a shift in conversation to focus on the impact of an experience rather than the experience itself.

Resnick, 2022

## Tentative Meeting Set-up

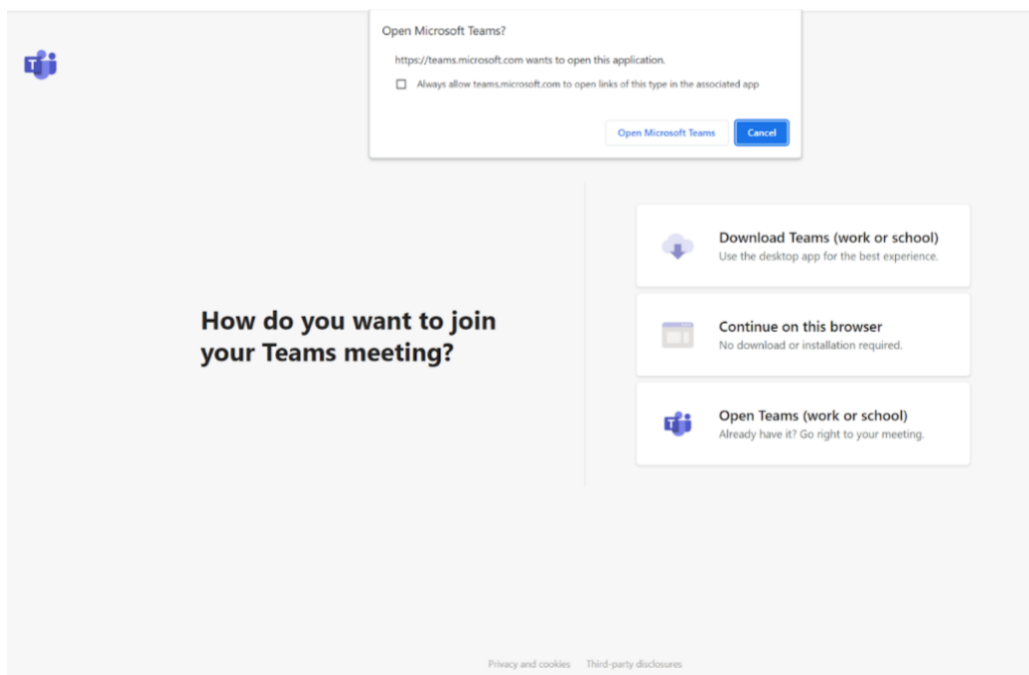
- Meeting links will be sent out the week before and again the morning of support group meetings
- Meetings will start at 7 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.
- You may log on as early as 6:45 p.m. to check technology and socialize.
- At 7 p.m., we will start with introductions. Introductions will be brief to ensure everyone has time to share.
- Meetings may include a pre-planned topic for the beginning of the meeting; however, time will always be designated for members to bring up anything of their choosing related to their loss.
- At approximately 8:20 p.m., we will start wrapping up the conversation out of respect for everyone's time.

## Optimizing the Virtual Setting

- Please mute when not speaking if you have background noise.
  - Please be in a room with no other people.
  - If you need to be in a room with other people, please wear headphones and make sure to position the computer so only you can see the screen to ensure the privacy of others sharing.
  - You may choose to use the chat feature if preferred.
    - No screenshots or recording.
- We encourage participants to keep their camera on; however, participants may choose to keep their camera off if that is more comfortable.
- Please send a message to the meeting facilitator if you are signing off early.

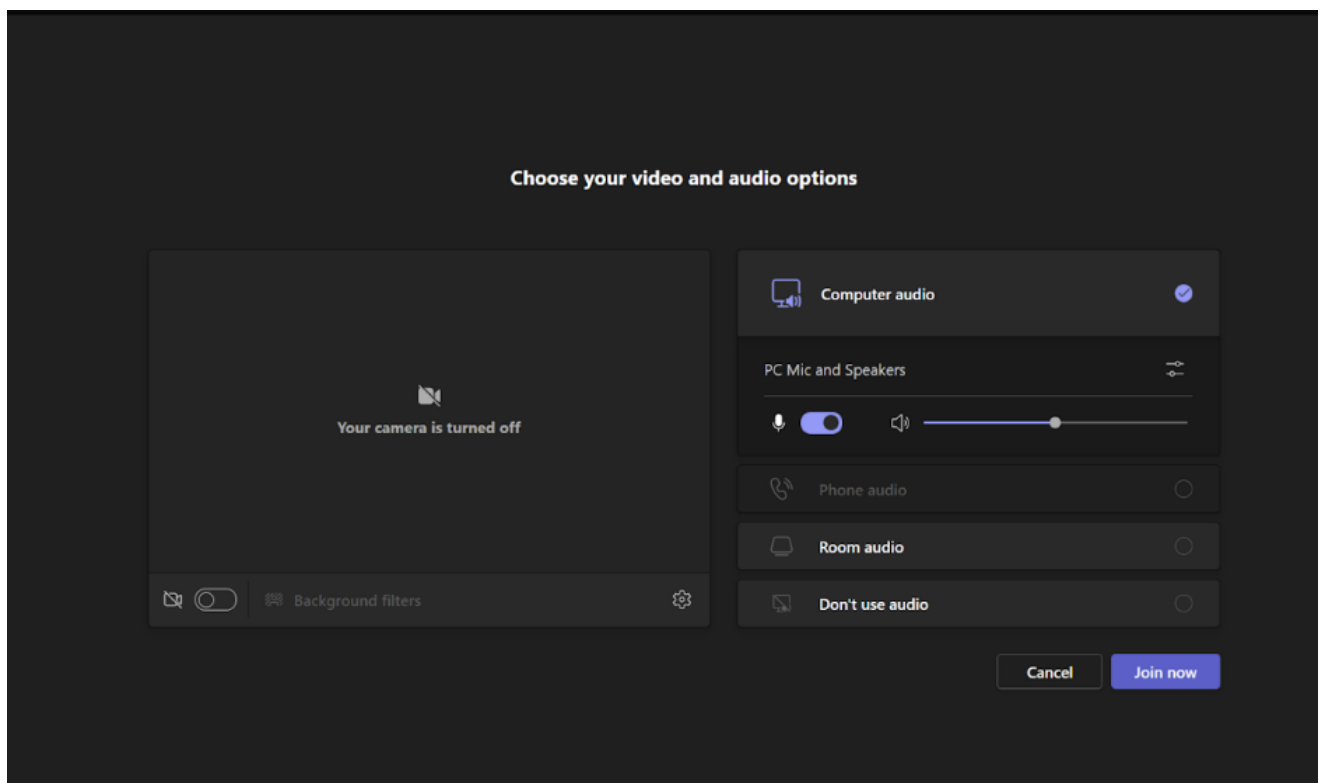
## Introduction to Microsoft Teams\*

1. When you first click on the group meeting link, the page shown below should show up. You can choose to download Teams, or you can click “Continue on this browser” to open a new tab and join the video right away. If you do not have a Microsoft account, you may be prompted to download Teams.



*\*The program for which these materials were created is not affiliated with Microsoft. Microsoft Teams is the platform through which support group meetings are held, and the materials in which Microsoft Teams is referenced are used for informational purposes.*

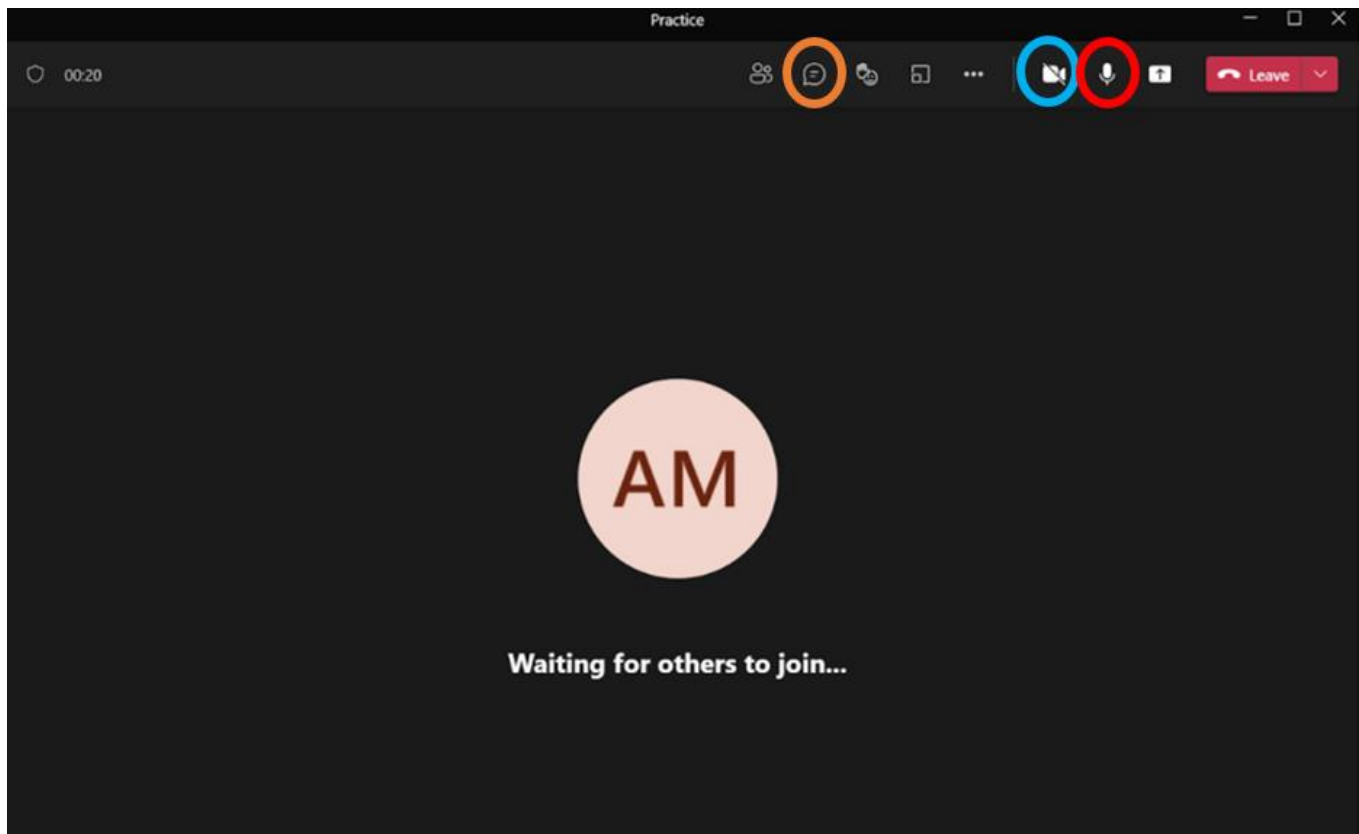
- Next, the page shown below should appear, which allows you to test your microphone and speakers before clicking “Join now.”



3. Once in the meeting, you may choose whether to have your camera and microphone on or off.

The line running through the **camera** indicates that the camera is turned off. The same would go for the **microphone**. Click each image to turn it on or off.

Click the **chat bubble** to send messages to the group

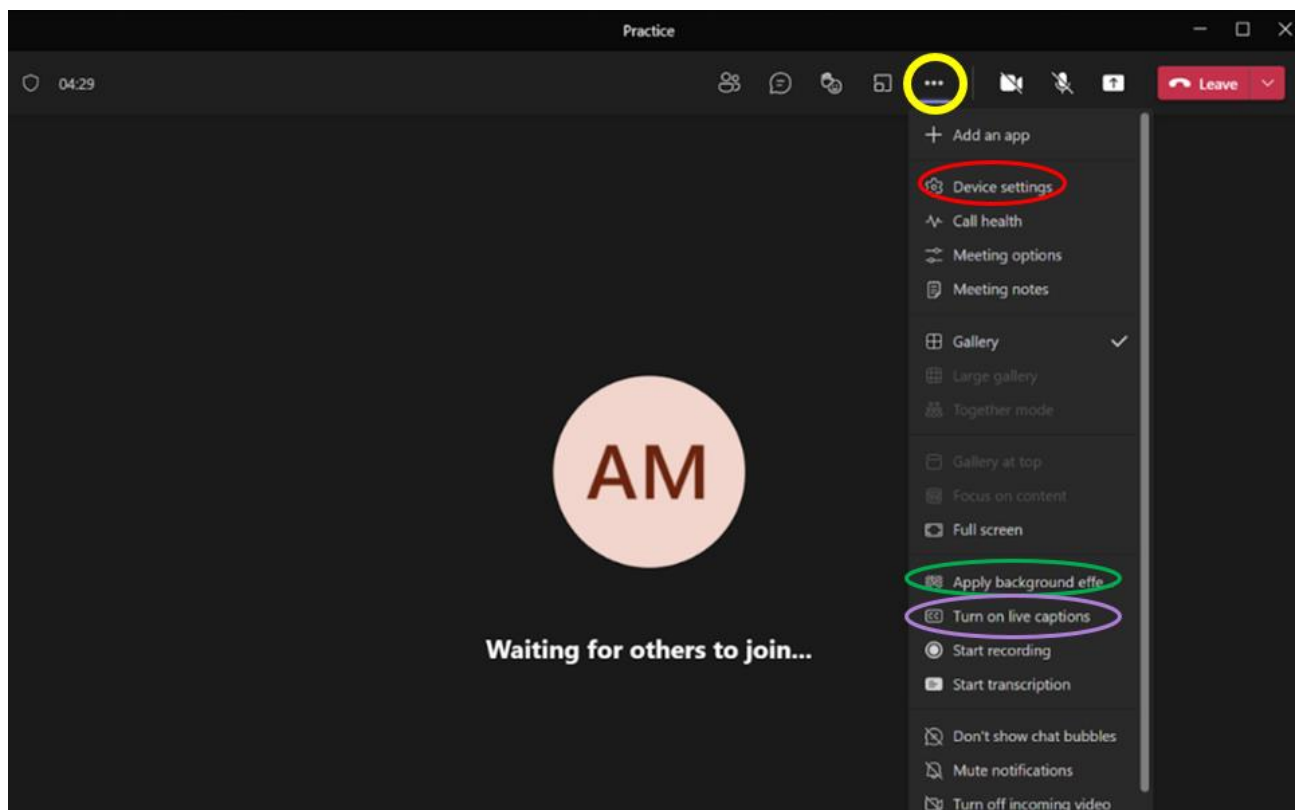


4. Click the **three dots** to bring up more options.

Click **Device Settings** to adjust your sound/speaker

Click **Apply Background Effects** to blur or change your background

Click **Live Captions** to read what is being spoken



# Intake Information

*Meetings take place every month on the 2nd Monday and 4th Tuesday, 7-8:30 p.m. CT*

- Name:
- Email:
- Mailing address:
- Phone number:
- How did you hear about us?
- Name of person lost/relationship:
- Loved one's birthday:
- Your birthday:
- Date of the loss:
- Are you interested in attending group on Monday, Tuesday, or both?
- Do you have internet access? (Note: If attending the group with others in the same room, please be sure to wear headphones to maintain the privacy of the group)
- How did you hear about our support group?

*\*All information provided will be kept confidential*



## Intake Conversation

*Conducted by facilitator in-person, via a phone call, or virtually*

1. Tell me about your loved one...what were they like, their personality?
2. Tell me briefly about the loss...and share as much or as little as you wish about it.
3. Have you ever participated in a support group before?
4. What do you hope to get out of the group?
5. Do you have any questions about the group? Any concerns?
6. Do you feel ready to talk about your experience? Or hear others talk about theirs?

# Group Protocols

Three group protocols are provided for use by support group facilitators or to be used as examples when creating other activities moving forward.

Cole's Seven Steps are used to structure the following group protocols (Cole, 2018). Cole's Seven Steps are organized as follows (Cole, 2018):

1. Introduction- *includes a warm-up, explanation of group expectations and purpose, and an introduction to the activity*
2. Activity- *something that is done with the group to address any group objectives that have been set*
3. Sharing- *involves sharing any product of an activity or sharing about their experience within the activity*
4. Processing- *prompts participants to reflect on their thoughts and feelings regarding the activity*
5. Generalizing- *identifying themes among group members (done by participants or facilitator)*
6. Application- *group members identify how what they experienced with the activity can connect to or carry-over to their everyday life*
7. Summary- *restating key points of the activity or following discussion (done by participants or facilitator)*

# Group Protocol 1- Group Goal Setting

## Objectives:

1. By the end of the session, group members will individually create at least 1 personal goal they have for participating in the group.
2. By the end of the session, group members will generalize at least 2 themes among their goals.
3. By the end of the session, group members will collaborate with each other and the group facilitator to create up to 3 group goals.

## • **Introduction**

- Welcome: *"I'd like to welcome everyone, and I thank each of you for being here."*
- Introduce Group Purpose: *"The purpose of this group is to have a safe space to discuss anything related to our losses. As you all know, loss by suicide comes with its own unique experiences, so this gives us a chance to speak with others who may have had similar experiences or can empathize with what you're going through."*
  - Review group guidelines
- Warm-up: Ask each person to briefly share their name and their relationship to their lost loved one.

## • **Activity/Sharing**

- *"Thank you all for sharing. Typically, we might start with opening the floor to discussion, but with it being our first session, I'd like to take a few minutes to think about and share what goal you are hoping to achieve with the support of this group."*
  - Allow a few moments for participants to consider what their goals are before asking volunteers to share. Screen-share an open document, and as each volunteer shares, type their goal onto the list for members to refer to in the questions that follow.

- **Processing**
  - *“How do you think participating in this group can help you reach your personal goals?”*
  - *“How can you help other group members reach their goals within this group?”*
  
- **Generalizing**
  - *“Considering what everyone has shared, what are some common goals within this group?”*
    - As common goals are identified, type the goals into the document that has been screen shared.
  - *“What might be the benefit of participating in a support group specifically for survivors of suicide loss, rather than loss in general?”*
  
- **Application**
  - *“How can this participating in this group help you reach your personal grief goals?”*
  - *“How can this group help you to develop other skills for a positive grief experience?”*
  
- **Summary**
  - *“Thank you all for participating. This helps me as a facilitator and all of us as a group to get an understanding of what we want to achieve with our grief and how this group may help. We can use these goals in future group meetings as well to see how we have progressed in striving towards those goals.”*
  - Reiterate any themes, shared group goals, and any noteworthy responses made.
  - Transition to open discussion.

## Group Protocol 2- Drawing Kawa Rivers

### Objectives:

1. By the end of the session, group members will categories internal and external influences on their life into components of the Kawa Model through drawing their own rivers (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).
2. By the end of the session, group members will verbally explain how the influences affect their river's flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).
3. By the end of the session, group members will problem-solve to identify at least one change they can make to create more space for their river flow (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).

### • **Introduction**

- Welcome: *"I'd like to welcome everyone, and I thank each of you for being here."*
- Introduce Group Purpose: *"The purpose of this group is to have a safe space to discuss anything related to our losses. As you all know, loss by suicide comes with its own unique experiences, so this gives us a chance to speak with others who may have had similar experiences or can empathize with what you're going through."*
  - Review group guidelines
- Warm-up: Ask each person to briefly share their name and their relationship to their lost loved one.

### • **Activity**

- Activity Preparation: Prior to the meeting, ask group members to bring 2 pieces of paper and coloring utensils or a pen.

- Introduction of Activity/Activity Purpose: *“Today, we will be using what is known as the Kawa Model to look closely at the different influencing factors in each of our lives. The purpose of this activity is to encourage you all to examine how the influences come together and affect your daily life. By being able to visualize these factors, we can then identify changes that can be made to maximize your life’s flow in alignment with what is important to you” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- Introduction of the Kawa Model: *“The Kawa Model views one’s life as a river. Within the river, there are different influencing factors. These influences wax and wane and change throughout the lifespan, but today, we’re going to look at each of our rivers and the influencing factors as they are right now.*
  - *The influencing factors include the riverbanks, which includes the things and people around you; the rocks, which are barriers or challenges that inhibit the river’s ability to flow freely; and driftwood, which are personal characteristics, values, or resources that can either be helpful or unhelpful” (For example, being determined versus being stubborn) (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“Before we open for discussion, we will be completing a short activity. You will need the following items: 2 pieces of paper, a writing utensil, and, if preferred and/or available, coloring utensils (crayons, markers, colored pencils).”*
- *“First, divide your paper into 4 sections by drawing lines.*
  - *At the top of each section, write the following words: riverbanks, rocks, driftwood, and river” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“Under ‘Riverbanks,’ I want you to write answers (less than a few words) to the following questions:*
  - *Who do you spend most of your time with?*
  - *From whom do you feel the most comfort?*

- *Where do you spend most of your time?*
- *Describe your relationship with others you interact with on a daily basis, either good or bad” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“We’ll do the same thing and write brief answers to questions under the ‘Rocks’ section.*
  - *What difficulties/challenges are you having right now?*
  - *What is stopping you from doing the things you want?*
  - *What would you like to change about your life right now?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“Next, write brief answers to the following questions under the ‘Driftwood’ section.*
  - *How do you cope with stress/grief?*
  - *How would you describe your connection with spirituality at this time, if any? (ex. strong, firm, challenged)*
  - *What personality traits do you feel are strengths of yours?*
  - *What personality traits do you feel might be inhibiting you?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“Finally, write brief answers to the following questions under the ‘River’ section.*
  - *What is most important for you to be able to do?*
  - *Write down your most prioritized roles in life (ex. Parent, sibling, employee, homeowner)*
  - *What adjective would you use to describe your life at this time?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
- *“Now take out your other sheet of paper, and we’re going to use the key words you used to answer those questions in drawing your river. You can choose to use different colors for each component as you desire.*

- *First, we'll draw your riverbanks. Ideally, we want plenty of space for our river (our life) to flow. If you feel like you have a very supportive environment, you'd draw a wider, deeper riverbank that allows the river to flow more freely. If you feel like your environment might be a contributing barrier in your life, you'd want it narrower and shallower to show that less water is flowing through.*
  - *Then, if you have room, use your list of answers to write some strengths or limitations inside the riverbanks that you drew.*
- *Next, we're going to draw our rocks, or our barriers, which sit at the bottom of the river. Write down your answers from the rocks section- using just a few words, and then you'll draw a circle around the word to create the rocks. The bigger you see these challenges, the bigger the rocks should be, and vice versa.*
- *Next, we'll draw driftwood. As I mentioned, driftwood might be helpful or unhelpful. For helpful resources or traits you possess, you can write the answers towards the top of the river and draw a rectangle around them. If you feel these traits or resources are instead unhelpful and may contribute to the rocks as barriers, you can write the answers around the rocks before drawing the rectangle to symbolize the driftwood.*
- *Finally, in whatever space is available, write down the roles that you prioritized. Next, look at the adjective(s) you used to describe your life, and consider how a river would look if given the same adjective. Draw waves to capture this description as you deem fitting" (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*

- **Sharing**

- Ask for volunteers to share as much as they would like about their river.
- "How does each factor affect your overall river?"



- *“What surprised you about drawing your influencing factors?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
  
- **Processing**
  - *“How do the different factors interact?”*
  - *“How are these influences related to your experience of loss by suicide?”*
  - *“How does your river compare to what it might have looked like before your loss?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
  
- **Generalizing**
  - *“Considering what everyone has shared, what are some similarities of the effect of suicide/grief on our daily lives?”*
  
- **Application**
  - *“Looking at your river drawings, what changes can you make to create more space for your river’s water to flow smoothly?” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
  
- **Summary**
  - *“As we go through different life experiences, your river and its influences change. The impact of your grief may change with time as you adapt to its impact. By looking at how different all of these external and internal factors are affecting our lives, we can find some areas that can be adjusted to allow some more peace into our life’s flow” (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*
  - Reiterate any themes and any noteworthy responses made.
  - Transition to open discussion.

## Group Protocol 3- Continuing Bonds

### Objectives:

1. By the end of the session, group members will express the meaning of activities or topics that were important to their loved ones, or to their relationship with their loved ones (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).
2. By the end of the session, group members will identify at least one way the meaning behind these activities or topics have changed since their loss (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).
3. By the end of the session, group members will individually determine at least one solution for how they can incorporate these activities or topics into their lives now (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).

### • **Introduction**

- Welcome: *"I'd like to welcome everyone, and I thank each of you for being here."*
- Introduce Group Purpose: *"The purpose of this group is to have a safe space to discuss anything related to our losses. As you all know, loss by suicide comes with its own unique experiences, so this gives us a chance to speak with others who may have had similar experiences or can empathize with what you're going through."*
  - Review group guidelines
- Warm-up: Ask each person to briefly share their name and their relationship to their lost loved one.

### • **Activity/Sharing**

- Activity Preparation: Prior to the session, ask each participant to bring a symbol of an activity or topic that was either important to their loved one

or something that they used to do with their loved one. Examples might include a book, music sheets, a tool, etc.

- Introduction of Activity/Activity Purpose: *“‘Continuing bonds’ is a concept of finding ways to maintain the relationship between you and your loved one after they have passed away. I have asked you all to bring a symbol of something that was important to your loved one or something that you used to do together. The purpose of this is to provide an opportunity to talk about your loved one, think about what was important to them or your relationship with them, and discuss how the activity or topic has changed since your loss.*
  - *I’d like to go around and have each of you show the item, and with that, I’d like you to share why it is important to you and/or your loved one. I’ll ask for volunteers to go first, and if you do not wish to share, you may choose to pass” (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).*

### **Processing**

- *“How has participating in the activity or topic that was important to your loved one changed?”*
- *“How has the meaning behind the activity or topic changed?” (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).*

### **Generalizing**

- *“What are some common themes from what’s been said so far?”*
- Identify any themes based on observation.

### **Application**

- *“How can you change the meaning behind this activity to view it in a better light?”*
- *“How might participating in activities that were important to your loved one be worthwhile for your grief journey?”*

- *“How can you continue to maintain the bond with your loved one?”* (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).
  
- **Summary**
  - Repeat themes/takeaways
  - *“‘Continuing bonds’ tells us how we can maintain the connection with your lost loved one in a new way. By adjusting the meaning behind these activities, it can help us strengthen the relationship, and we can learn to incorporate the relationship into our lives with new meaning”* (Hoppes & Segal, 2010).
  
  - Reiterate any themes and any noteworthy responses made.
  - Transition to open discussion.

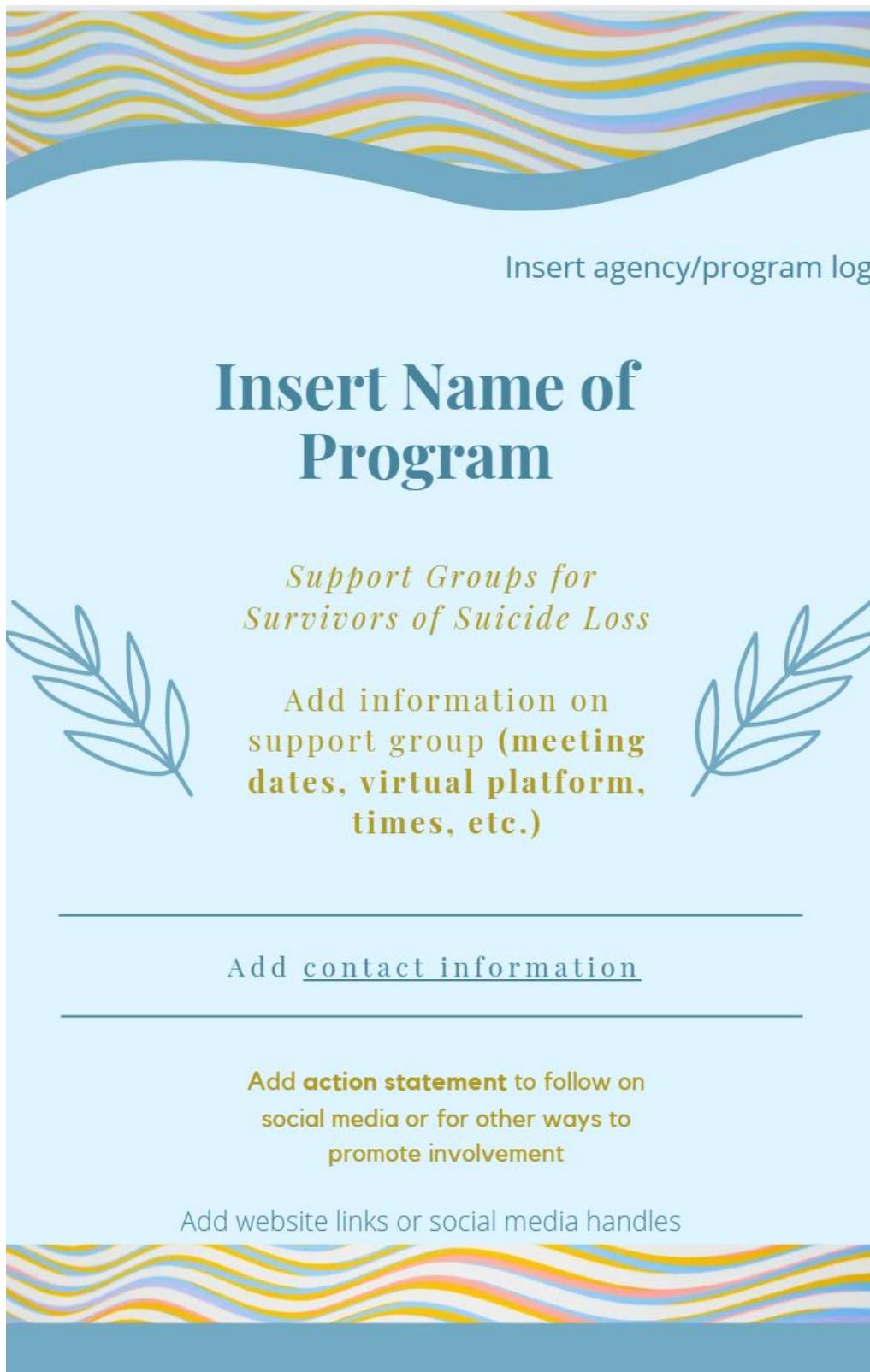
# Creating Promotional and Informational Materials

When creating materials to raise awareness of your support group in your target communities, the following considerations should be made for ease of reading:

- Use at least size 12 font
- Be concise, with no more than 20 words per sentence
- Keep in mind that your audience may have different levels of reading skills
  - Avoid jargon, and use simple, familiar words under two syllables in length
- Use bullet points to break up the information
- Emphasize takeaway points with bolding or underlining
- Use colorful texts and images and print on bright colored paper to catch viewers' eyes
- Make sure the text contrasts with the paper so that the text can easily be seen (i.e., black on white)
- Allow plenty of blank space to avoid overwhelming the reader with texts

Bastable et al., 2020

# Sample Flyer



# Sustainability Plan for Established Virtual Support Group

- The open virtual support group was created to be continued indefinitely.
- Meeting days/times were established with consideration of avoiding the same days and times of other support groups in the states.
  - Collaboration with group members can take place to adjust days/times if necessary to match their schedules long-term.
- Should the group grow over ~15 members, additional support groups may be established.
- A volunteer through Altru Health Systems will be designated to facilitate the virtual support group after the occupational therapy student's capstone experience is completed.
- No costs are necessary to continue the virtual support group
  - Microsoft Teams provides unlimited meeting times with an account.
  - Product materials can all be distributed and used virtually.
- Materials were created for continued use with growing the group, including:
  - Promotional and informational materials.
  - Group protocols for an example of guided activities and discussion.
  - Forms for the intake process.
- A social media account made to promote both the virtual support group and the TEARS program will be transferred into ownership of the program coordinator.
  - A hashtag unique to the TEARS program was created to promote connecting meaningfully with stakeholders through sharing pictures or posts of TEARS events and services.
  - The support groups will continue to be promoted on social media once per month to continue raising awareness about the services available.
- QR codes were created that can be used in promotional materials to provide a quick link to the TEARS website and to receive stakeholder contact information via a Qualtrics survey. A Qualtrics survey were created to be used for participants to fill out the intake information form.
  - Access to QR code and Qualtrics survey responses will be transferred into ownership of the program coordinator, along with a spreadsheet of participant background and contact information will be transferred to the program coordinator for use by her and the replacing group facilitator.
- A survey was created to receive feedback from group participants and make changes as necessary.

## Kawa-Based Survey

*To be completed by group participants to receive insight on perceived effectiveness of the support group in relation to the Kawa Model (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).*

Instructions: For each item, check (X) the empty box below the statement that you feel is most accurate.

### Rocks (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

- Participating in the support group has/may help me identify barriers in my life.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

- Participating in the support group has/may help me identify how these barriers influence my quality of life.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

### Driftwood (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

- This support group has/may enhance my strengths in coping with my grief.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

- This support group is/may be a resource I use to navigate my grief.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>



**River flow** (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

- The support group has/may help me participate in activities that I used to enjoy prior to the loss.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

- The support group has/may help me navigate difficult aspects of life post loss.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

**Riverbanks** (Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

- This support group has/may allow me to develop meaningful connections with others who have had experiences like mine.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

- I feel comfortable in the virtual setting.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

**Space for change**(Teoh & Iwama, 2015)

This support group has/may help me find ways to improve my quality of life.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Additional comments or feedback:

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