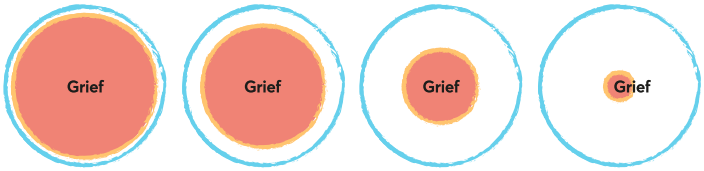
GROWING AROUND GRIEF

Some past theories of how people grieve describe different 'stages of grief' – as if everyone's grief follows the same path and that there is a 'right' way to grieve. We prefer to look at it another way: after talking to many thousands of bereaved families, the way of looking at grief that makes the most sense to us is the idea of '**growing around grief**'.

Older theories seemed to suggest that there is a time limit or natural progression to grieving: you'll have heard people say something like 'time heals', suggesting that grief gets smaller. However, bereaved people's experiences suggest that, actually, grief doesn't go away, it doesn't even grow smaller – we grow larger around it. And this isn't straightforward either; some days there's space for new experiences and optimistic feelings: some days, it is all grief. However, in time, there seems to be more hope.

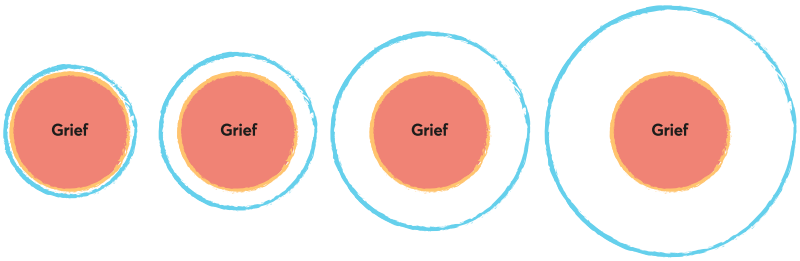
This way of looking at grieving was developed by Lois Tonkin, after a woman in one of her bereavement groups described her experience of grief.

Earlier models suggest that grief grows smaller over time...



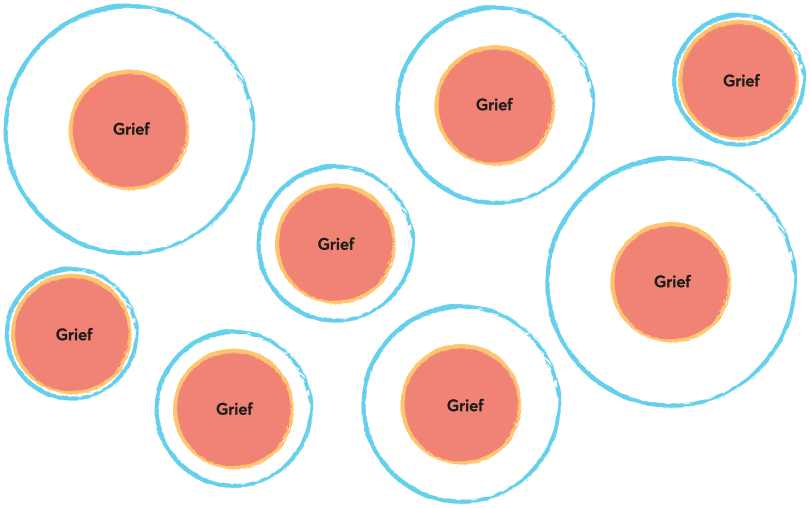
The woman said that she had been told that grief (the dark circle) would take up all of her (the lighter circle) but in time, it would get smaller.

Later ones, that you grow around grief...



In fact, the woman said, her grief stayed the same size (the dark circle) but she (the lighter circle) grew space around the grief for other thoughts, other experiences, other emotions. She grew around the grief.

This isn't a straightforward process, either...



Of course, this isn't a straightforward upward process. Some days, the grief takes up all the space. Some days there is room for other feelings and experiences. Over time, these may become more frequent. But the grief hasn't shrunk – you've grown around the grief.

WINSTON'S WISH

Giving hope to grieving children

Tonkin, L. *Growing around grief - another way of looking at grief and recovery* Bereavement Care Volume 5, 1996, Issue 1

Growing Around Grief (Version B)

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