



2023
GRIEF
TALKS
CONFERENCE

To Confirm Your Attendance,
Please Text **QUVFEK** to **412-301-9919**

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Using Creative Arts
To Process Miscarriage and Perinatal Loss

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Agenda

- INTRODUCTION

- OVERVIEW OF MISCARRIAGE & PERINATAL LOSS

- WORKING WITH THIS KIND OF GRIEF

- USING CREATIVE ARTS TO PROCESS GRIEF

- EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY & CONCLUSION

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Introduction

I am Hayley Wilds, owner and therapist at the Center for Creative Counseling based in Pittsburgh, PA. I have worked in the mental health field for 20 years supporting individuals, families, and therapists. I'm a licensed counselor, art therapist, and certified family-based mental health professional.

I specialize in therapy for moms, grief and loss, and childhood trauma.

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*I have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Learning Objectives

Participants will...

- Gain a deeper understanding of the unique and often unacknowledged grief experience of miscarriage and perinatal loss, including the presenter's own lived experience.
- Learn ways to invite self-expression and validate the experience of loss through the therapeutic/supportive relationship.
- Discover useful creative arts techniques designed specifically for miscarriage & perinatal loss to support the healing process.

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Limitations

- This workshop is designed to provide an introductory level of information about miscarriage/perinatal loss.
- This workshop introduces techniques for how to incorporate creative arts into an existing therapy practice and/or self-care routine. **It does not meet the required educational and training standards to practice “art therapy” and does not entitle participants to use any corresponding titles (i.e., art therapist).**
- While studies exist that indicate the benefits of creative arts in grief counseling, more research is needed in this area.

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Self-Care and Emotional Safety

- Please feel free step away to take care of personal needs.
- This topic and surrounding discussion may trigger your own grief or trauma, especially experiences involving pregnancy loss. Please do what you need to feel comfortable and take breaks as needed.
- This workshop briefly touches the legal aspects of medical treatment surrounding pregnancy loss, including abortion. The purpose is to raise awareness about current challenges pregnant individuals may face. Though participants may have differing beliefs on the subject, this workshop is not designed to provide space for political debate.
- Please respect participant privacy and keep personal information confidential.
- If you choose to participate or share during the workshop, please speak from your own experience to help maintain a safe space for everyone.

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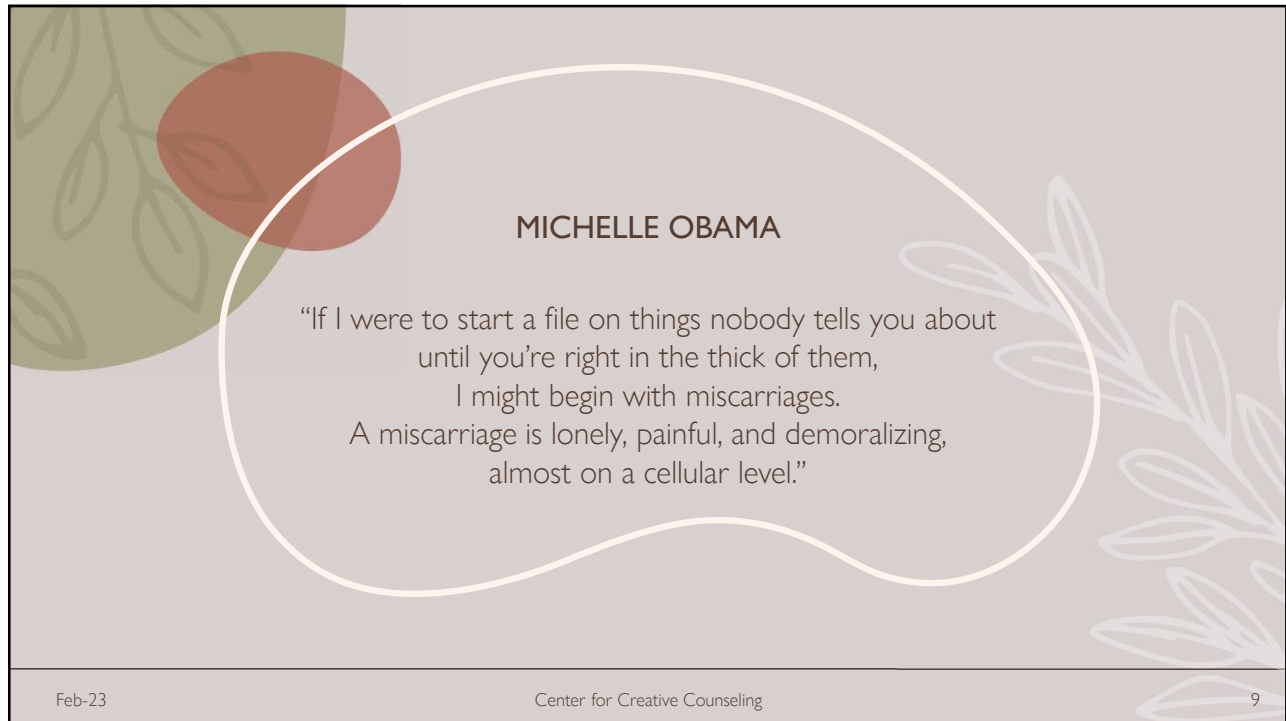
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Overview of Miscarriage and Perinatal Loss

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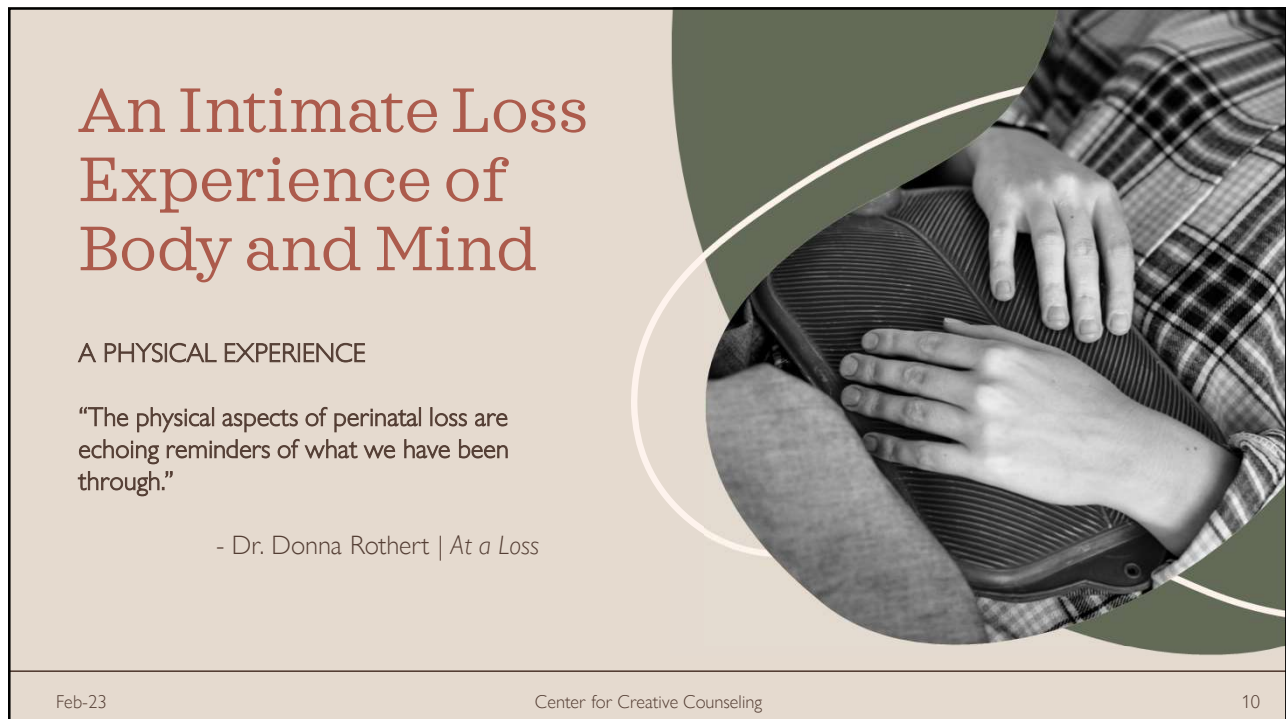


MICHELLE OBAMA

“If I were to start a file on things nobody tells you about
until you’re right in the thick of them,
I might begin with miscarriages.
A miscarriage is lonely, painful, and demoralizing,
almost on a cellular level.”

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An Intimate Loss Experience of Body and Mind

A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

“The physical aspects of perinatal loss are
echoing reminders of what we have been
through.”

- Dr. Donna Rothert | *At a Loss*

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An Intimate Loss Experience of Body and Mind

A LONELY EXPERIENCE

“The ambiguity of losing a baby before it is born is reflected in our lack of rituals for this kind of grief...People may become tongue tied around you or decide not to mention your loss at all.”


- Dr. Donna Rothert | *At a Loss*



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Types of Pregnancy Loss




MISCARRIAGE

Occurs prior to 20 weeks gestation.
(incomplete, missed, etc)




RECURRENT LOSS

2 or more pregnancy losses.



STILLBIRTH

Occurs after 20 weeks gestation.










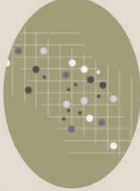
ABORTION

Elective procedure, sometimes medically recommended.

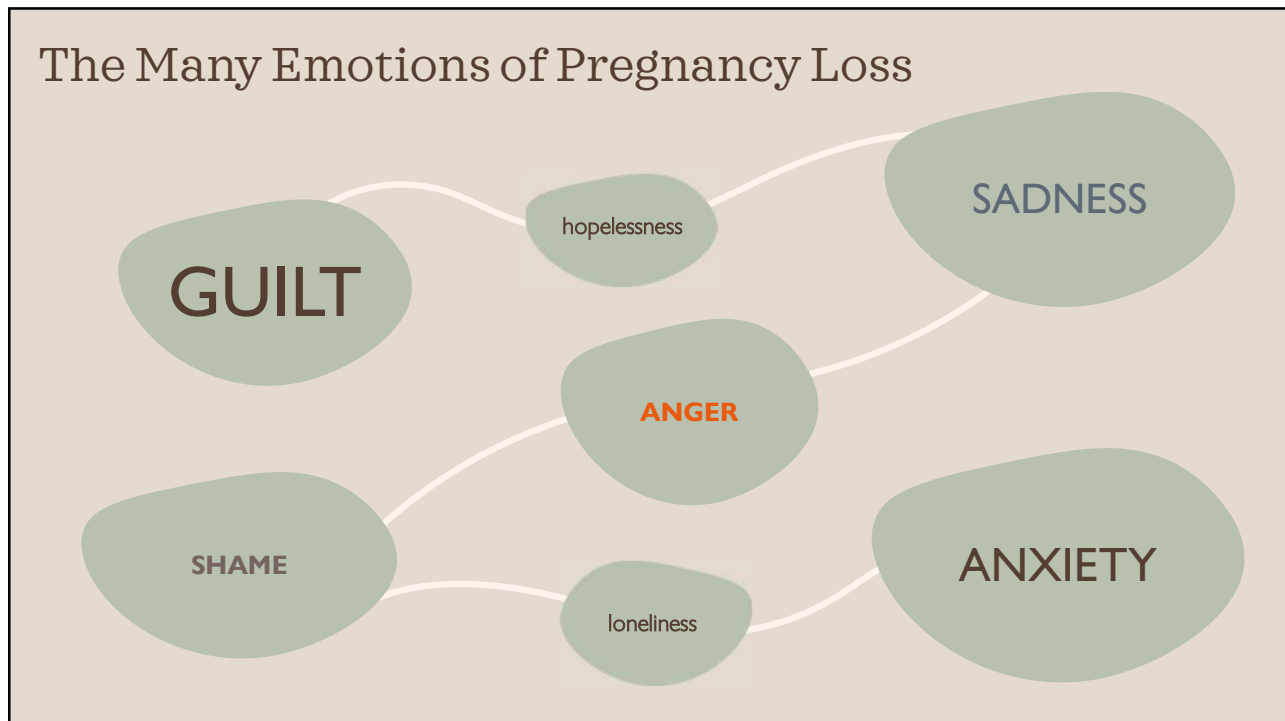
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Types of Pregnancy Loss

 <p>CHEMICAL PREGNANCY Very early (sometimes undetected) pregnancy loss.</p>	 <p>MOLAR PREGNANCY Pregnancy tissue that will not grow into a fetus.</p>	 <p>ECTOPIC PREGNANCY Fertilized egg that attaches outside of the uterus.</p>	 <p>FAILED IVF CYCLE Embryo did not result in pregnancy.</p>
 <p>SELECTIVE REDUCTION Pregnancy of multiples where at least 1 fetus has complications.</p>	 <p>MULTI-FETAL REDUCTION Procedure where pregnancy of multiples is reduced.</p>	 <p>TERMINATION FOR MEDICAL REASONS Medically recommended termination for health reasons.</p>	 <p>NEONATAL/POSTNATAL Death of a newborn baby younger than 28 days old.</p>

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Related Mental Health Concerns

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Postpartum Mood Issues
- PTSD
- Prolonged Grief & Complicated Grief

Always helpful to seek counselor support, but especially crucial when grief gets complicated.

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An Unacknowledged Loss

Pregnancy Loss in Western Society

- Stigma – fault of the pregnant person, something wrong with their body, etc.
- Silence – no one talks about it, no one knows what to say, implicit message that you should keep it to yourself
- Unhelpful Responses – immediate attempts to make sense of the loss or “fix” the situation that invalidate emotional pain and evoke blame & shame frames
- Lack of Rituals – few options for marking the loss, implicit message that you should just move on

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An Unacknowledged Loss

Pregnancy Loss Across Cultures

According to data from the World Health Organization:

“How women are treated during pregnancy is linked to their sexual and reproductive rights, over which many women around the world do not have autonomy. Societal pressures in many parts of the world can mean that women get pregnant when they are not physically or mentally ready. Even in 2019, 200 million women who want to avoid pregnancy have no access to modern contraception. And when they do get pregnant, 30 million women do not give birth in a health facility and 45 million women receive inadequate or no antenatal care, putting both mother and baby at much greater risk of complications and death.”

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An Unacknowledged Loss

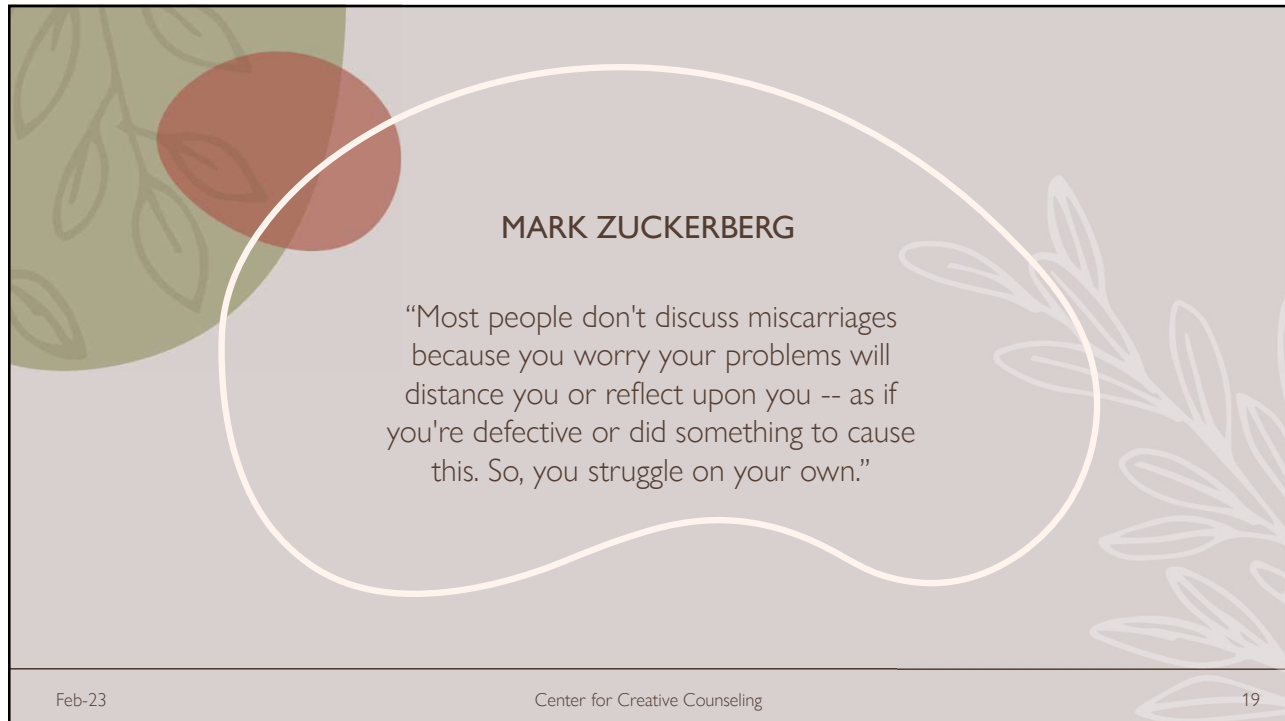
- Wanted Versus Unwanted Pregnancy
- Abortion

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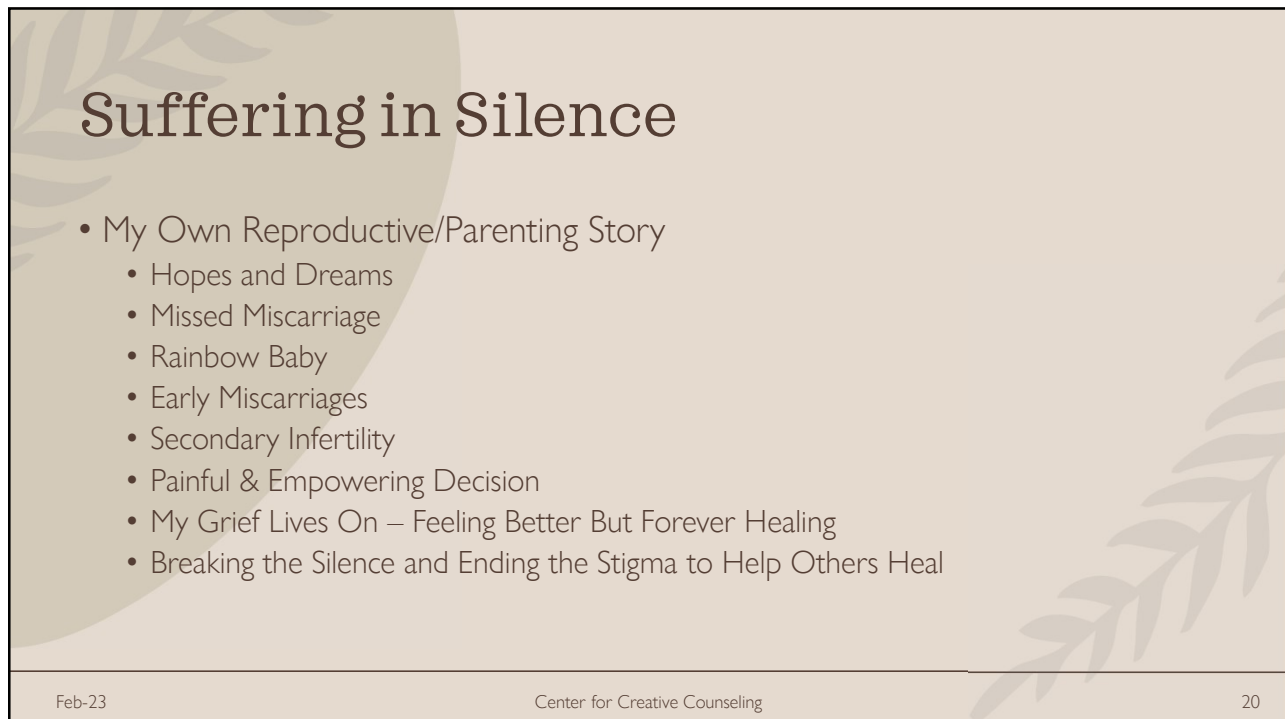


MARK ZUCKERBERG

“Most people don't discuss miscarriages because you worry your problems will distance you or reflect upon you -- as if you're defective or did something to cause this. So, you struggle on your own.”

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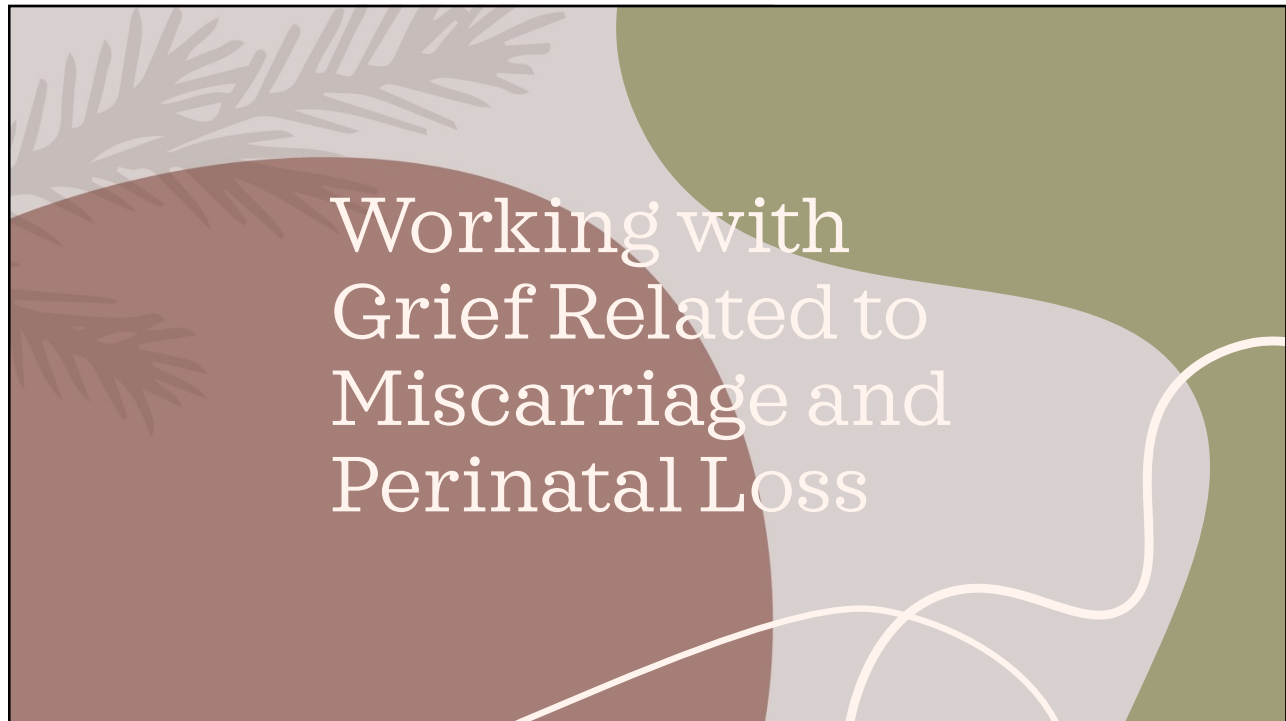


Suffering in Silence

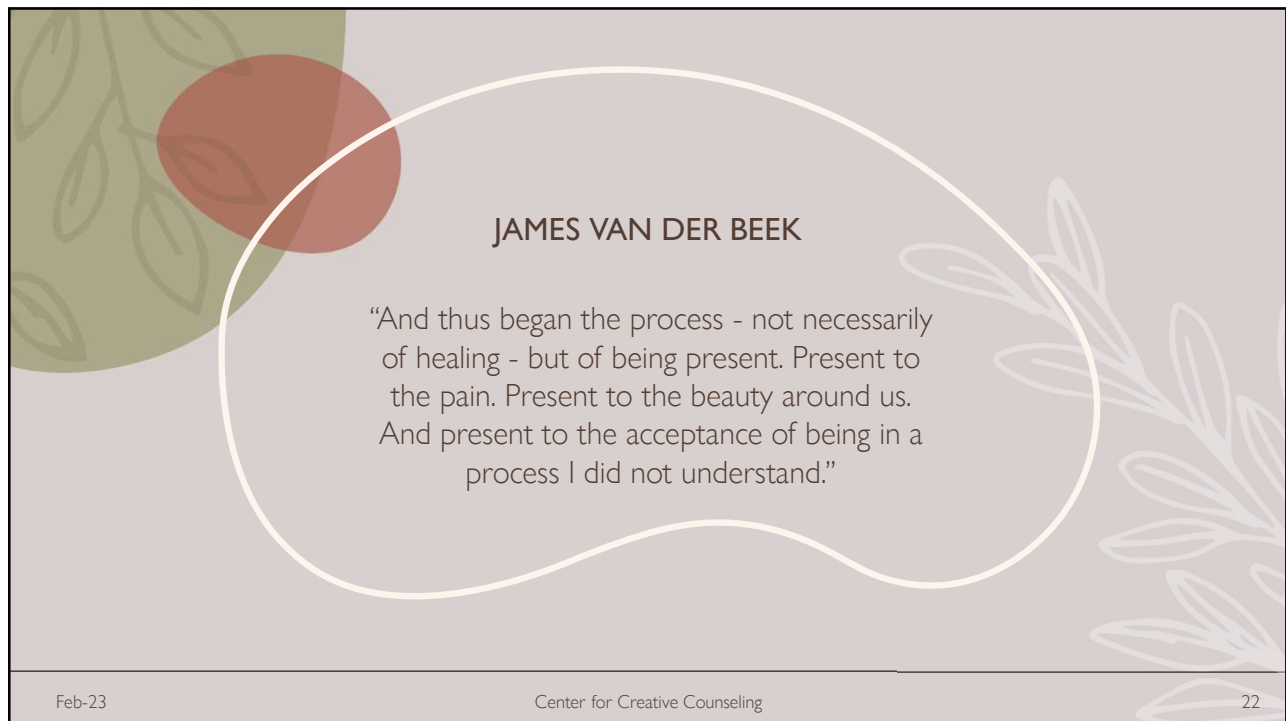
- My Own Reproductive/Parenting Story
 - Hopes and Dreams
 - Missed Miscarriage
 - Rainbow Baby
 - Early Miscarriages
 - Secondary Infertility
 - Painful & Empowering Decision
 - My Grief Lives On – Feeling Better But Forever Healing
 - Breaking the Silence and Ending the Stigma to Help Others Heal

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Providing Support

Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** Be a Supportive & Empathetic Listener
 - Use Reflective Listening, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing
- **Do** Use the Individual's Language and Descriptors
 - (i.e., passed away, dead child, my baby died, I lost my baby, etc.)
- **Do** Your Research
 - Have a basic understanding of types of pregnancy loss, terminology, procedures, etc.
- **Don't** Make Assumptions
 - Let the Individual Tell Their Story – just because you've done some research doesn't mean you are the expert on your individual's experience of loss.
 - Try not to overlay your own belief system to their loss experience.

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Providing Support

Dos and Don'ts

- **Don't** offer Platitudes that imply a rush to get over the loss:
 - "Everything happens for a reason"
 - "It's part of God's plan"
 - "At least you know you can get pregnant"
 - "Thankfully, you have other children"
- **Do** Provide supportive statements like:
 - I'm so sorry for your loss.
 - How are you doing with all of this?
 - This must be hard for you.
 - I'm here and I want to listen.

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Validation & Exploration: Tips for Professionals

Telling the “Reproductive Story”

- A Narrative to Define How they Envisioned their Parenthood Journey Over Time
- A Living and Breathing Story that Can be Revisited and Redefined to Promote Healing
- Let Individual Share Whatever Feels Safe in Order to Avoid Re-Traumatization

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Validation & Exploration: Tips for Professionals

Meaning-Making and Reframes

- Allow individual's meaning to take shape in its own time.
- Tie in the cultural frames they have shared that they identify with.
- Avoid bringing in your own beliefs and expectations about grief and loss
- Help individual create/establish rituals

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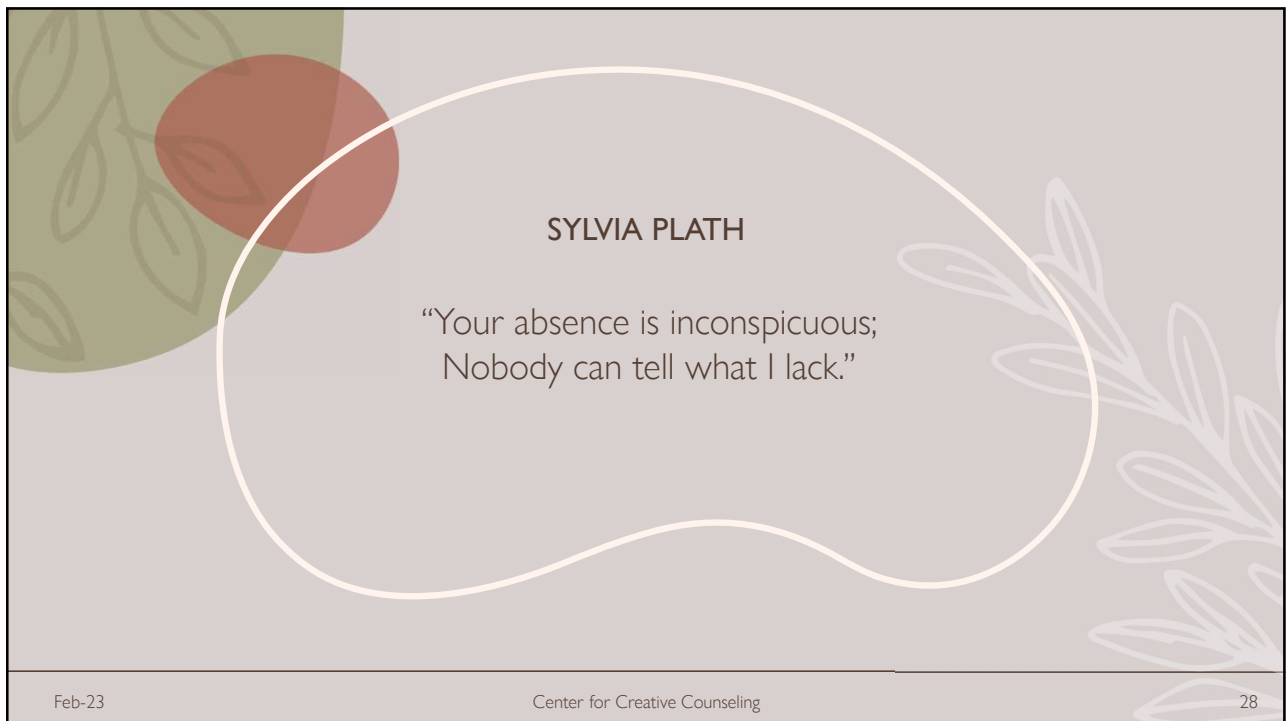
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Using Creative Arts to Process Miscarriage Grief

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SYLVIA PLATH

“Your absence is inconspicuous;
Nobody can tell what I lack.”

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Benefits of Creative Arts for Grief

- Art Pieces Serve as Safe Containers for Grief
- Opportunity for Self-Expression Beyond Talk Therapy
- Supports Meaning Making and Reframes of Grief Experiences
- Help Externalize Emotions Associated with Loss
- Artwork Gives Clarity and Physicality to a Loss the Feels **Invisible**

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Benefits of Creative Arts for Grief

- Establishes a Record of the Individual's Grief Journey & Transformation
- Writing, Journaling, and Visual Journals Help Individuals Create/Recreate the Narrative of the Loss
- Art Pieces can Serve as Tributes and Memorials
- Art-Making Gives Voice to Existential & Spiritual Exploration

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Processing the Art

- Externalization of Emotions
- Process Over Product
- Judgement Free Zone
- Meaning Making
- Let the Art Lead the Way



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Creative Arts Interventions

Draw the Emotion

Notice the emotions that come up when you reflect on your loss. Name them and/or write them down, then select one to depict. Using line, shapes, and colors, draw the emotion on the page. It can be abstract or figurative.



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Creative Arts Interventions

Loss Collage

Take some time to meditate on your grief and loss while browsing images online or in magazines to use for a collage. Select and collect images that speak to you and assemble them on a page through cutting, ripping, gluing, and/or taping. You may use mixed media as well to incorporate materials that represent things of importance with regard to your loss.



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Creative Arts Interventions

Mask Making

Imagine your grief and loss experience, both what you have shown to the world and what you have concealed. Using paint or permanent markers, use the outside of the mask to represent what you show to the world with regard to your loss and the inside of the mask to represent what you keep hidden.



Artwork Credit: A. White, 2010

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Creative Arts Interventions

Grief Containers

- Drawn Containers
- 3-D Boxes
- Treasure Chests
- Secret Vaults

Artwork Credit: [Creativity in Therapy](http://creativityintherapy.com)



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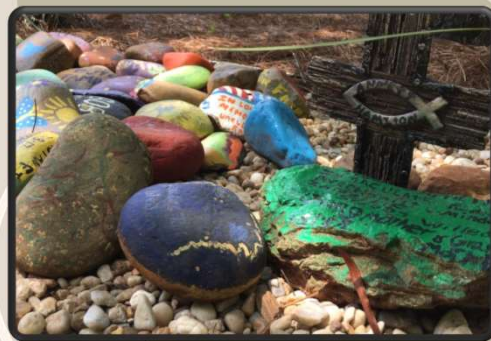
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Creative Arts Interventions

Tributes and Memorials

- Memory Keepsakes (Shadow Boxes, Photo Albums, Personalized Objects, Scrapbooks, etc.)
- Name-Based Artwork
- Rock-Painting and Rock Gardens
- Tattoo Design
- Cultural Rituals



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Creative Arts Interventions

Letter-Writing

- Letter to My Lost Child
- Letter to My Future Self
- Letter to My Past Self
- Letter to the Unknown "Cause"



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Creative Arts Interventions

Journal Therapy Prompts

- I wish my partner knew...
- The thing that hurts most is...
- I imagined that you would be...
- I was looking forward to...
- The Mother I Longed to Be
- My Dreams for Your Future

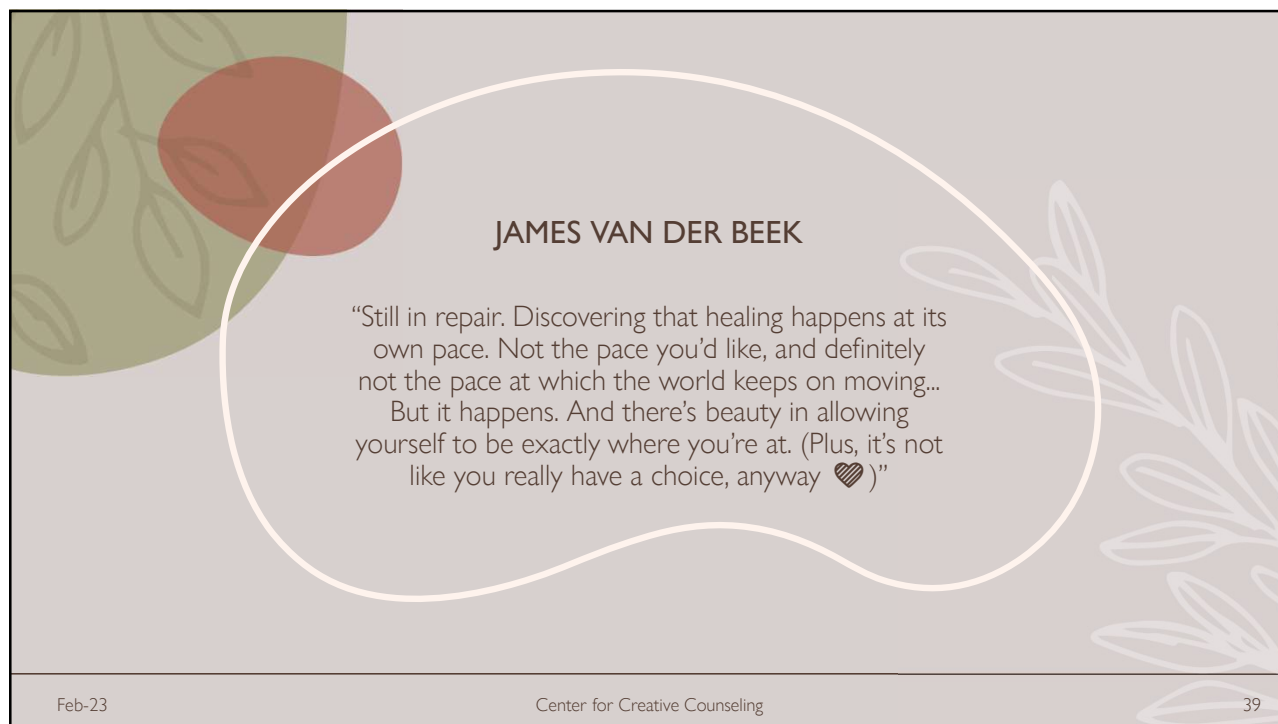


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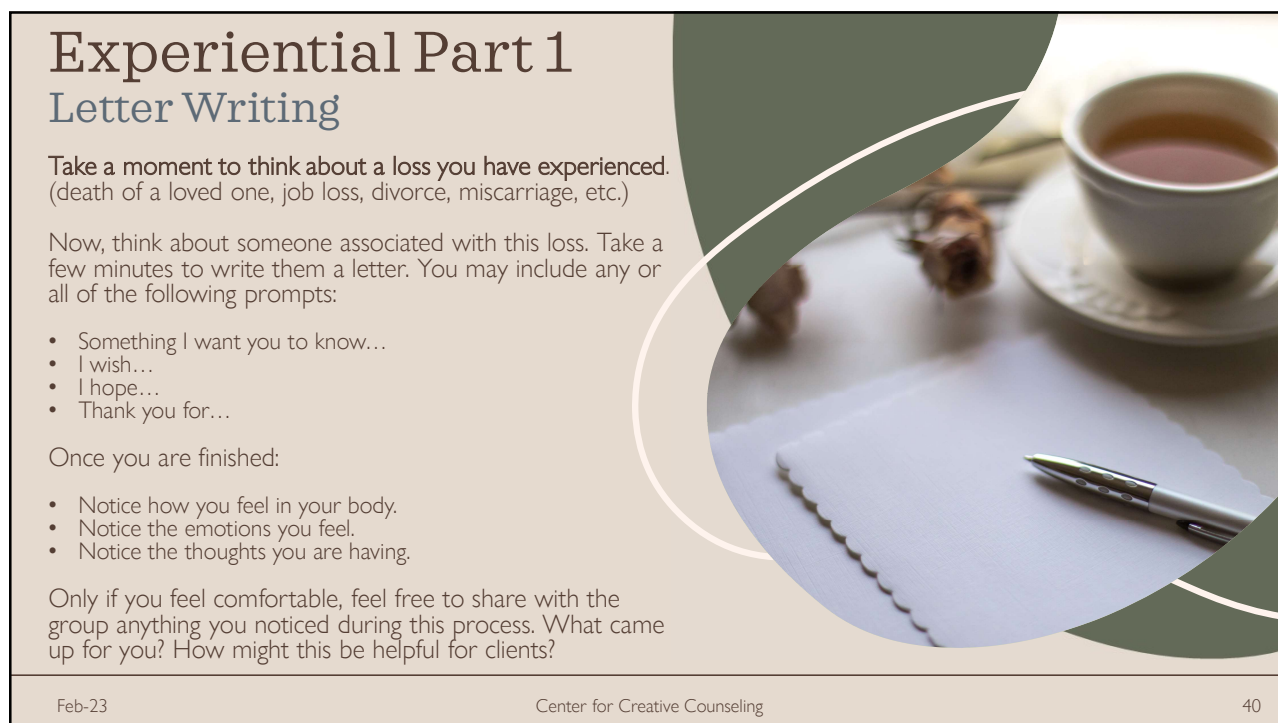


JAMES VAN DER BEEK

“Still in repair. Discovering that healing happens at its own pace. Not the pace you’d like, and definitely not the pace at which the world keeps on moving... But it happens. And there’s beauty in allowing yourself to be exactly where you’re at. (Plus, it’s not like you really have a choice, anyway 🍷)”

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Experiential Part 1

Letter Writing

Take a moment to think about a loss you have experienced. (death of a loved one, job loss, divorce, miscarriage, etc.)

Now, think about someone associated with this loss. Take a few minutes to write them a letter. You may include any or all of the following prompts:

- Something I want you to know...
- I wish...
- I hope...
- Thank you for...

Once you are finished:

- Notice how you feel in your body.
- Notice the emotions you feel.
- Notice the thoughts you are having.

Only if you feel comfortable, feel free to share with the group anything you noticed during this process. What came up for you? How might this be helpful for clients?

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Experiential Part 2

Draw the Emotion

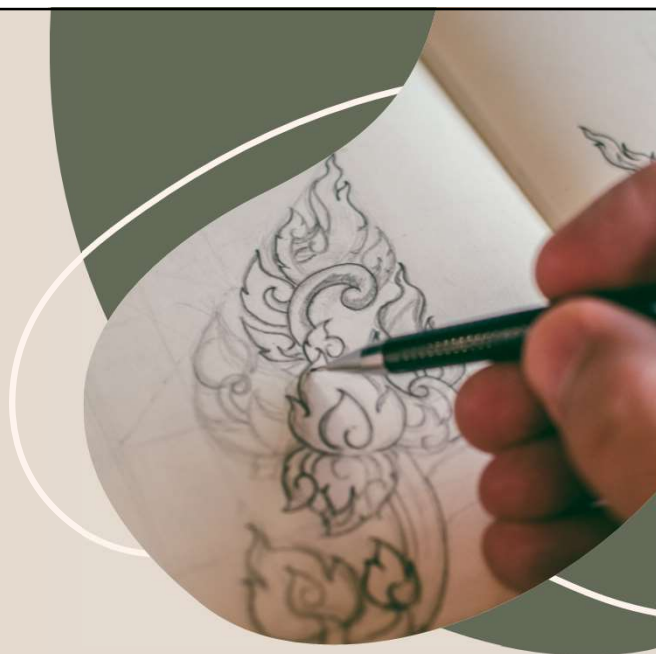
Take a moment to think about an emotion you experienced while reflecting on your loss.

Using lines, shapes, and color, take a few minutes to draw that emotion however you wish.

Once you are finished:

- Notice the shapes you included.
- Notice the colors you chose.
- Notice any visual symbols or imagery that stand out to you.

Now, reflect on what your drawing might be trying to tell you about your emotional experience of your loss. Feel free to share what thoughts or feelings come up for you while reflecting on your artwork.



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Experiential Part 3

Contain the Emotion

Take a moment to think about what came up in your emotion drawing.

Now, on a separate sheet of paper, draw a container of your choice and imagine wrapping this container around your emotion, or placing your emotion inside this container for safe keeping.

Once you are finished:

- Notice how you feel in your body.
- Observe your container drawing
- Notice the type of container you chose.
- Notice it's size, shape, and function.

Now, reflect on the type of container you chose to hold your emotion.

After this reflection, take a few deep breaths and re-center before we depart.



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Pregnancy Loss Resources

- <https://www.tommys.org/baby-loss-support>
- <https://nationalshare.org/>
- <https://rainbowfamilies.org/programs/support-groups>
- <http://www.aheartbreakingchoice.com/>
- <https://stillstandingmag.com/>
- <https://sweetgraceministries.com/services/>
- <https://www.plida.org/>
- <https://www.littleangelgowns.org/about>
- <https://rtzhope.org/>
- <https://centerforcreativecounseling.com>



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Expressive Arts Resources

- *250 brief, creative & practical art therapy techniques: A guide for clinicians and clients* by Susan I. Buchalter
- *Essential Art Therapy: Effective Techniques to Manage Anxiety, Depression, and PTSD* by Leah Guzman
- *Grief Unseen: Helping Pregnancy Loss Through the Arts* by Laura Seftel
- *Grief and the Expressive Arts: Practices for Creating Meaning* edited by Barbara E. Thompson, Robert A. Neimeyer
- Article on Altered Book-making by Cathy Malchiodi: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/arts-and-health/201312/alterd-book-and-visual-journaling>



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Questions & Reflections

What questions do you have?

What are your take-aways?

Any final thoughts?



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Thank You

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- Updates on therapy openings, referrals & wait list times
- Info on therapy groups
- Resources and wellness tips
- Training and event info

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- Confirm your attendance today - text **QUVF EK** to **412-301-9919**
- Complete the evaluation and claim your credit



CE questions? bernice.sulkowski@ahn.org



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