

Activity: Nature Goal: Physical Populations: Specialized Populations

TH Activity Plan – Poem + Nature Walk - Bereaved

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Photo by L. Fleming



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will be inspired by a poem about connecting with the past through nature, taking a walk outdoors as part of the session if possible.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Use intellectual capacity to understand & address feelings of bereavement.

Physical: Walk in the outdoors; practice physical exercise as a coping mechanism for grief; increase fresh air intake & melatonin production

Psychological/Emotional: Address feelings of grief; explore strategies for coping with grief

Sensory: Observe & use the senses during an outdoor walk; consider the ephemeral aspect of life surrounded by nature

Social: Participate in the session of art + nature immersion/walking with other including people grieving

Materials

Poem, single or multiple prints for participants' use

Or digital version of poem

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare hard copy & digital versions of the poem(s). Ensure pathway or route for outdoor walk is free of obstructions & safe for participants & their physical functioning.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants to the group, comprised of people grieving loved ones. Explaining the flow of the session reading a poem then walking outdoors, identifying that the physical exercise & nature engagement elements can offer healing/therapeutic benefits.
3. The poem can be read by one person, several people, all together and can be done indoors prior to walk or as the first outdoor engagement. Participants will have the poem for use in session & post session, hopefully for additional uses.
4. Walking in nature, at a leisurely pace, facilitator can extract lines from the poem and ask reflective rhetorical (or other) questions, pausing at different spots. Pointing out examples of nature's cycle – new emerging plants, reproducing birds/plants, & decaying leaves can integrate concepts of life's cycle, renewal & beauty of nature.
5. Participants depart with the original poem, others the facilitator has gathered, possibly contact information for other group members, or dates for the next facilitator-led grief support session.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: A poem can inspire, inform or guide people grieving for lost loved ones. Combining this with nature engagement, preferably outdoors, can support the concept of life's cycle, where nature's examples of birds, leaves and new plants can be reinforcing and inspiring. This combination of poetry and outdoor experience will appeal to most including those not as attuned to poetry. Using sensory interactions can be stimulating, particularly for people who have spent a lot of recent time indoors. Time outdoors provides opportunities for increased physical exertion, fresh air intake and melatonin production, all of which can improve

sleep, important for healing and wellbeing. Experiencing nature, and others who are on grieving journeys can encourage positive feelings of being alive, permission to enjoy some of life's pleasures beginning with simple walks in nature, listening to birds singing or observing emerging flowers.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitator is responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Facilitator's assessment of psychological/emotional state of individuals will guide their inclusion in this session. Some may not be ready to hear the poem; those who lost loved ones from suicide may prefer other poems which can be substituted. Appropriate sun protection and clothing for the outdoor walk should be available. Pathways and walking route should be safe, free of ice, snow or mud and accessible for participants.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Using techniques like mindfulness, meditation, and guided imagery can enhance the TH session. Collaborative treatment with other health professions (grief counselors, mental health professionals, trauma specialists) may be appropriate. If working with children or youth, other poems will resonate with them more effectively. Incorporating painting, nature mandalas or other art activities can explore the themes of life, death, grieving, nature's beauty in support of this session and outdoor time.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Ineffable Living. (2024). [ACT for grief and loss: 6 powerful tools and worksheets to help you move forward with grief- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy \(ACT\)](#).
- Hamblet Adams, C. (1998). *My beautiful broken shell*. Harvest House Publishers.
- Hart, F. (2024). [TH activity plant – nature mandalas](#). Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database.
- Jobin, C., Davis, T., Mortenson Davis, E., Looker, J. & Carder, A. (2023). *Leaving: An anthology of poetry about dying, grief and the mystery of absence*. Bennison Books.
- Neimeyer, R.A. (2017). *Techniques of grief therapy assessment and intervention*. Routledge.
- Oliver, M. (n.d.). Poems on grief. http://www.journey-through-grief.com/poems-on-grief.html#google_vignette
- Sutton, J. (2018). 10 grief counselling therapy techniques & interventions. Positive Psychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/grief-counseling/>

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.

“Spring Poem for the Sake of Breathing

The sky wants the water to turn grey, but if I
notice how waves
play with the clumps of yellow flags, or the
ways turtles share logs,
or even try to understand a friend's decision to
walk onto a glacier
and end her life—I will be ready for any
poems that have been waiting.
The horizon opens as I walk, escorted by
swans and Canada geese.
I need to stop backpedaling into the present.
In my old life people would straighten
The truth, but the river flows in curves.

The names of my father and my mother rest
next to each other in the Cemetery.
The distance between me and the mountains
measures an uneven thought: I feel
like an orphan.
An early moon is just a piece of change in the
softening sky.
Light is such an actress. Time to seek
Hoppers's wish to simply paint
sunlight
On the wooden all of a house. I am growing
older. *Maur* in Japanese means
the ship
will make it back home.”

By James Masao Mitsui