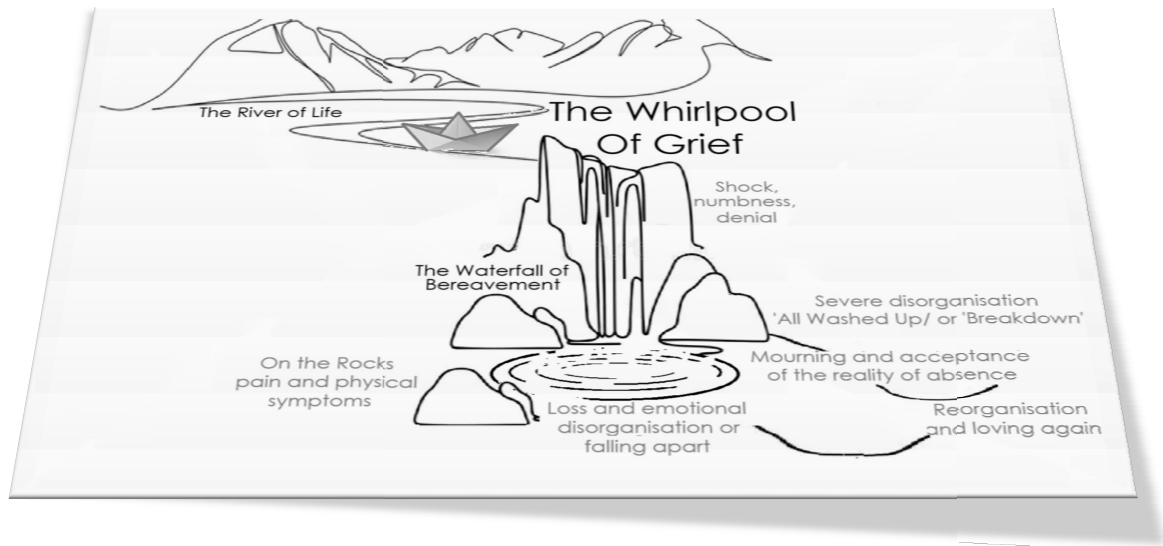


The Whirlpool of Grief Model:

The **Whirlpool of Grief Model**, developed by Dr. Richard Wilson in the 1980s, offers a vivid metaphor to describe the unpredictable, circular, and often overwhelming nature of grief. Unlike linear stage-based models, it emphasizes the dynamic and repetitive experience of loss.



In this model, the grieving individual is imagined as an **oarsman in a boat**, navigating unfamiliar and turbulent waters. The process begins with the **Waterfall of Bereavement**—the sudden plunge into grief that follows a loss. This drop represents the shock and disorientation that often accompanies the realization of death or major life change.

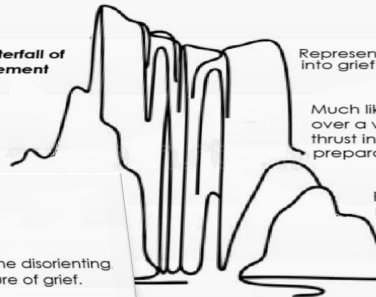
After this plunge, the bereaved person finds themselves caught in the **Whirlpool of Grief**, a swirling current of powerful emotions such as denial, anger, guilt, despair, and confusion. Much like being pulled around in circles, mourners may feel as though they are revisiting the same painful emotions again and again, rather than moving forward in a straight line.

Occasionally, the oarsman drifts into **shallows**—moments of respite, where grief temporarily eases and allows space for calm, reflection, or even glimpses of normality. These are not signs that grief has ended, but brief pauses before being pulled back into the current.

With time, effort, and the gradual processing of loss, the oarsman eventually finds their way to **calmer waters**. This symbolizes the point where grief begins to soften, no longer dominating daily life in the same turbulent way. However, the model makes clear that one never returns to the original river. Instead, the mourner travels on a **different river**, representing a reorganized life shaped by loss—one where the memory of the loved one remains, but where acceptance and adaptation make forward living possible.

In conclusion, the **Whirlpool of Grief Model** illustrates that grief is not a linear journey but a turbulent, circular process marked by repeated waves of intense emotion. While the bereaved may feel pulled back into the whirlpool many times, moments of respite and gradual adjustment eventually lead to calmer waters. Life after loss is lived on a “different river,” acknowledging that though life is forever changed, it can be reorganized with acceptance, meaning, and renewed direction.

The Waterfall of Bereavement



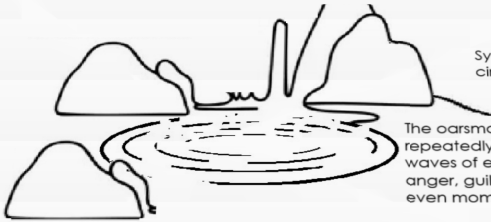
Represents the sudden plunge into grief after a loss.

Much like a boat unexpectedly going over a waterfall, the bereaved person is thrust into a new reality without preparation.

Feelings: shock, disbelief, numbness, confusion.

This moment marks the clear “before and after” divide in a person’s life.

The Whirlpool of Grief



Symbolizes the disorienting circular nature of grief.

The oarsman is caught in a vortex, repeatedly pulled around by waves of emotions: sadness, anger, guilt, yearning, despair, even moments of denial.

Importantly, the whirlpool emphasizes that grief is non-linear—people revisit emotions multiple times and may feel “stuck.”

Progress is not about escaping the whirlpool immediately, but learning to endure and gradually navigate its pull.

The Shallows



These are temporary periods of relief, where the current is less strong.

Grievors may experience calmness, distraction, or moments of normal functioning.

These interludes are necessary for recovery, allowing emotional and physical rest before being drawn back into deeper turbulence.

Calmer Waters

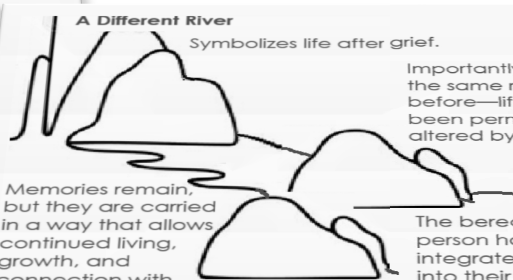


Over time, the oarsman moves beyond the whirlpool into more stable waters.

This does not mean the grief has disappeared, but that it no longer dominates everyday life.

The bereaved person has started to regain control, find meaning, and restore balance.

A Different River



Symbolizes life after grief.

Importantly, it is not the same river as before—life has been permanently altered by loss.

Memories remain, but they are carried in a way that allows continued living, growth, and connection with others.

The bereaved person has integrated their grief into their identity and reorganized their world.

This model is particularly powerful because:

- It acknowledges that grief is **not linear**, but cyclical and repetitive.
- It normalises the experience of revisiting painful emotions multiple times.
- It highlights that healing does not mean returning to how life once was, but instead adapting to a **new reality**.