

Audience Support Resources

Written and Curated by Dr. Charmain Jackman

2024-2025 Season

Message from Dr. Jackman

The following resources were curated by Dr. Charmain Jackman, founder and CEO of InnoPsych, an award-winning industry leader providing inclusive mental health solutions. InnoPsych's mission is to transform individual lives, organizations, and communities through the delivery of impactful and culturally-relevant mental health and wellbeing resources.

These audience support materials are intended to increase awareness and deepen understanding of themes presented in BLO's 2024-2025 season performances. Recognizing that some content may be triggering for certain audience members, we offer these trauma-informed resources as a starting point for support*. If you need immediate assistance, please contact emergency services (911 for medical emergencies or 988 for mental health crises).

Trauma, Violence, and Conflict

In our society, violence is often seen as a way to solve problems. It manifests in small ways in our daily lives, such as road rage or family disputes, and in major conflicts between groups and nations. When interactions become polarized, we risk losing sight of others' humanity, focusing solely on winning. Unfortunately, violence and conflicts, especially wars, can have devastating effects on individuals and societies, leading to physical injuries, psychological trauma, displacement, family separation, and loss of life. The impact often extends far beyond the immediate conflict, affecting future generations through intergenerational trauma, economic instability, and social disruption.

Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence

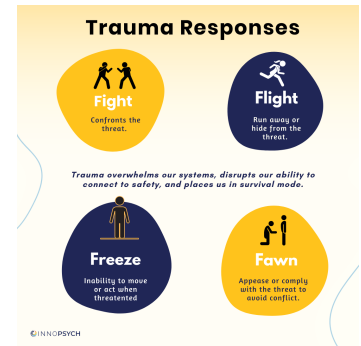
Domestic Violence (DV) or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a single incident or pattern of behavior in which one partner uses emotion, psychological, physical, and or sexual means to control their partner. These actions cause the harmed partner to fear for their life or the life of others which serves to keep them under control. Additionally, the partner causing harm may also use their love and affection as a weapon of control (do web search for cycle of violence or cycle of abuse images), which can make it extremely challenging for the harmed partner to leave the relationship. The harmed partner often lives in fear and secrecy due to shame and worries of harm to self or others. Data also shows that it can take several tries before the harmed partner to completely leave the relationship. Additionally, when a harmed partner attempts to leave the relationship, the violence often escalates, and in some extreme cases can be fatal. As a result, separating from these types of relationships typically requires advanced planning and support from others.

Betrayal

Betrayal occurs when someone engages in a behavior that violates your boundaries, and as a result, erodes trust in the relationship. This profound violation of trust can cause significant

emotional dysregulation and psychological distress.

Psychological trauma is a response triggered when a person feels threatened or fears for their life or the lives of others. This can occur in various situations, including environmental events, accidents, life-threatening circumstances, wars, and even discussions about sensitive topics like race. When faced with a perceived threat, a person's survival instinct may activate, resulting in an automatic "fight or flight" response. The fight or flight response has been expanded to include fawn and freeze (see diagram).



Minding Your Mental Health

Mental health refers to your emotional, psychological, and social well-being and how you cope with stress, interact with others, and make choices for your life. Taking care of your mental health is an essential part of living a happy, balanced, and fulfilling life. When people are unable to cope with the demands of life, they may develop a mental health condition or issue that affects how they think, feel, and behave. Mental health conditions can range from mild to severe and at the severe end, individuals may experience difficulty engaging in daily tasks. When people are experiencing moderate to severe symptoms, they may need more intensive support such as therapy, medication, or hospitalization. In the U.S., about 20% of the population will experience a mental health condition in a given year. The most common mental health conditions are depression and anxiety, and rates of depression and anxiety have skyrocketed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a clinical diagnosis used when an individual's trauma reaction persists for over six months. Expressions of PTSD include feeling on edge or jumpy; avoiding reminders of the trauma event; intrusive thoughts such as flashbacks; and changes in mood and daily habits.



Suicidal thoughts: When people are experiencing emotional distress, it is very common to have suicidal thoughts. Being able to talk to someone about their suicidal thoughts can help to normalize these feelings and get them the help they need. It is important to take notice when people are talking about suicide and to get them connected to help. Sharing the concerns with a doctor or faith leader, using a crisis hotline (e.g., 9-8-8), or even talking to a friend or family member can be the first steps to getting necessary help.

Coping with Grief

Death, separation, and betrayal are among life's most challenging experiences, often triggering intense emotions such as grief, anger, and confusion. The process of coping with loss is highly individual and can involve various stages, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It's important to remember that there's no "right" way to grieve and that healing takes time.

Stages of Grief:

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross outlined the 5 stages of grief in her book, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* (1969) and a 6th stage, added by David Kessler, author of *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*.

1. *Denial*: shock of the loss and rejection that the person has died; may experience numbness
2. *Anger*: intense feelings of anger and blame that may be directed at self and/or others
3. *Bargaining*: negotiating with God or higher power to reverse the death
4. *Depression*: despair and sadness that comes with recognizing what life is like without the person's presence
5. *Acceptance*: Adjusting to life without the person present
6. *Meaning*: Finding meaning in the deceased's life; a place for a hope and healing (added by David Kessler)

Grief is different for everyone and no one will follow these stages in exact order. However, they give you a preview of the different emotions that can emerge during the grieving process.

Grief Process

While there are many ways mourn the loss of a loved one, there are three components that are essential to any grief process:

- (1) *participating in rituals* (e.g., attending a funeral, wake, and other observance);
- (2) *connecting to your emotions* (e.g., experiencing the full range of emotions the loss); and
- (3) *being in community* (i.e., connecting with others versus withdrawing from others).

When someone fails to engage in these components, they can get stuck in their grief process which can lead to mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or thought disorders.

Healing Practices

Recovering from challenging life circumstances and trauma experiences can take time and will require a number of self-nurturing and healing practices. Everyone's healing journey will look different and it is important to engage in activities that help you. Below are some strategies to consider:

Music has the power to heal by allowing people to express what they are feeling inside, sometimes without words. It can help people get into touch with their emotions and music can help to reduce stress. You can create a playlist of songs that remind you of your loved one or you can create a new playlist that can help you navigate your grief and mourning process.

Mindfulness is a stress reduction practice that helps you to slow down by using your breath, focusing on the present, and engaging in curiosity and kindness. Engaging in a daily mindfulness

practice can help you to deal more effectively with stressful situations and traumatic events, foster calm, and decrease anxiety. To learn more about mindfulness, watch this brief [video](#) created by Dr. Jackman:

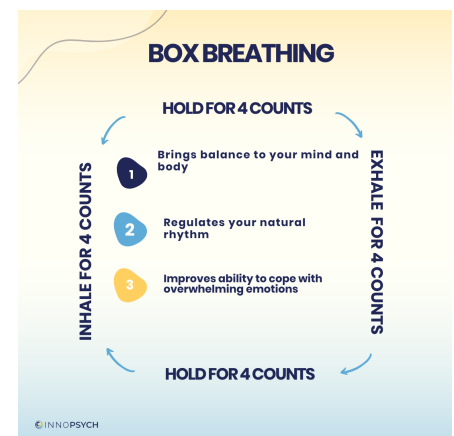
Grounding Techniques: help you to reconnect to your body and to your surroundings when you are feeling triggered, overwhelmed by memories or flashbacks, or experiencing a panic attack. Tuning In is an effective exercise to help you get grounded as it brings you back to the current surroundings. Simply find:

- 5 objects you can *see*
- 4 things you can *touch/feel*
- 3 things you can *hear*
- 2 things can *smell*
- 1 thing you can *taste*

Breathwork: the act of controlling your breath slows down your heart rate and your thinking and helps you to better regulate your emotions, thoughts, and actions. When you are feeling stressed, anxious or are having a panic attack, breathing techniques can help to activate the parasympathetic nervous system (responsible for relaxation) and help you to feel more in control. There are many examples of breathing, and you can do an internet search to find one that works for you. *Below is the box breathing or square breathing:*

1. Breath in for a count of 4
2. Hold your breath for a count of 4
3. Exhale through your mouth for a count of 4
4. Hold for a count of 4

Repeat 5 times or more



Reconciliation

Reconciliation offers an opportunity to repair relationships and address harms caused to those impacted by violence and conflict. For reconciliation to be effective, all involved parties must:

1. Acknowledge their role in the conflict
2. Show empathy for each other
3. Be open to exploring common ground
4. Commit to looking towards the future

Additionally, reconciliation requires setting aside blame and a willingness to move forward from past grievances. Examples of reconciliation can include:

- *Community service:* coming together to care for others can help to put your differences aside.
- *Healing circles:* creating spaces for open dialogue (e.g., restorative circles)

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- *Storytelling*: sharing your stories helps to build community and provides opportunity to learn from each other
- *Collaborative arts project*: Creating murals, quilts.
- *Sacred space*: Identifying a shared space that honors the contributions of community members.

Getting Help

Mental Health Resources:

If you have any concerns about your mental health or wellbeing, reach out to get support as soon as possible. For non-emergency situations:

- Talk to your **primary care physician** (PCP): Your doctor or nurse can do a preliminary assessment and they can guide you to the appropriate resources.
- *Therapy*: Consider seeing a therapist for individual, group or family therapy to help you to process the various emotions that you are experiencing. New to therapy? Check out these [FAQs for first time therapy seekers](#).
 - **Therapy Resources:**
 - [InnoPsych](#) Therapist Finder
 - [Zencare](#)

Crisis Hotlines (available 24 hours, 7 days a week for crisis concerns):

- Call the **National Suicide & Crisis Hotline**: dial **9-8-8 (available 24/7)**
- Massachusetts Behavioral Help line: Call or text **1-833-773-2445**.
- Text HOME to **741741**
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233**
 - Available in English, Spanish and 200+languages through interpretation services

Additional Resources:

- **Mental Wellness/Mindfulness/Meditation Apps**
 - [Shine](#) daily mental wellness for all
 - [MyRetreat app](#) pairs chocolate and meditation
 - [Tap with Libbie](#) teaches tapping and other emotional regulation skills
- **Wellness Tools:**
 - [My Time To Thrive: Feel. Grow. Heal™](#) card deck is stacked with powerful tools, activities and quotes created to kickstart your personal journey to healing from challenging and traumatic life events.
- **Books:**
 - [Grief Isn't Something to Get Over](#) by Mary Lamia
 - [The Year of Magical Thinking](#) by Joan Didion

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- [*Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief*](#) by Joanne Cacciatore
- [*Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*](#) by Sheryl Sandberg
- [*Homecoming: Overcome Fear And Trauma To Reclaim Your Whole, Authentic Self*](#) by Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis