



Grief In The Workplace

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Program Director



Services & Programs

Our History

The only [independent organization](#) in Illinois that supports children, teens, families, schools, and communities.

Recognized as a leader in the field of children's grief locally and nationally.

[Has been the 'go-to' program in the greater Chicago area, called upon to help young grieving families, school communities and others in crisis as they cope with death.](#)

Founded in [1998](#), by our founder Stefanie Norris, MSW, LCSW who saw a need while working in hospice care.

In 2001, the FBI requested that Willow House provide support to Chicago area families grieving the death of someone killed on [September 11th and for the survivors of the tragedy.](#)

Supported families and the community during [COVID-19](#) by adapting to virtual and in-person supports. Also provided community support after the [Highland Park shooting.](#)

Has provided direct services to hundreds of families each year and thousands more through our school-based programming.

Grief Support for Schools & Community

- Phone/Video Consultations
- Crisis Support following the death of a member of your community
- Grief-Education Professional Development
- 8-week Peer Support Groups for Schools
- Referral Services including individual therapist referrals
- All Services are **Free** – we operate off of grants and donations from community partners like you!

Grief Support Groups

****For children who have lost a parent or a sibling & their parent/guardian**

Peer Support Groups

Family Peer Support Groups

Arlington Heights, Chicago, Libertyville

- Pre-K to High School
- Young Adults (18-28)
- Spouse Loss
- Child Loss

Survivors of Suicide Loss

Bannockburn

- 1st Grade to High School
- Young Adults
- Adults
- Relationship to deceased is open

Expressive Arts

Bannockburn

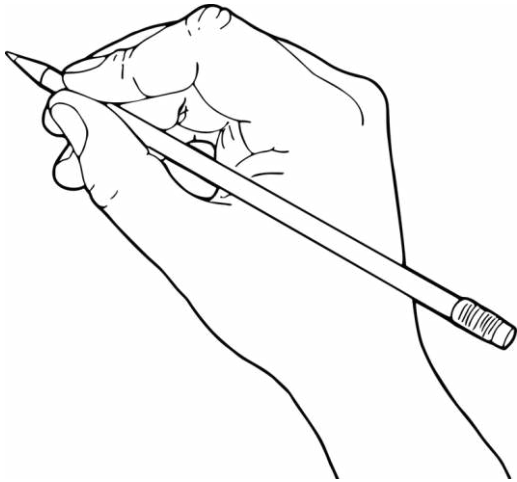
- For the whole family

- Virtual & In-Person Groups
- Assessments & Consultations
- Referrals to Community Partners, Individual Therapists, etc.
- All groups are facilitated by Willow House clinical staff or trained volunteers
- All Services are **Free**

Objectives

- What will we learn today
 - The components of grief and loss
 - Tools to support employees in and out of the work environment
 - Examples of things to say to a person who is grieving
 - Ways to have self-compassion & self-care during the workday, throughout stressful times
- Why discuss grief and loss?
 - 1 in 13 children in Illinois will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18
 - Unattended grief can lead to
 - 5x more likely to die by suicide
 - 9 times more likely to drop out of school
 - 10 times more likely to engage in substance abuse
 - 20 times more likely to have behavioral acting out and/or disorders
- How this presentation can apply you today

What Does Grief Mean to You?



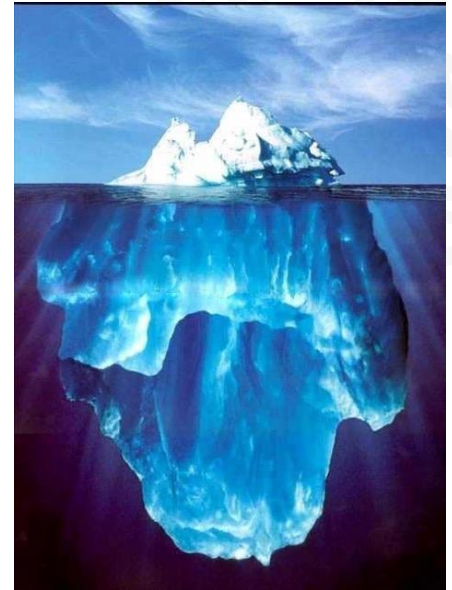
Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil/marker/pen

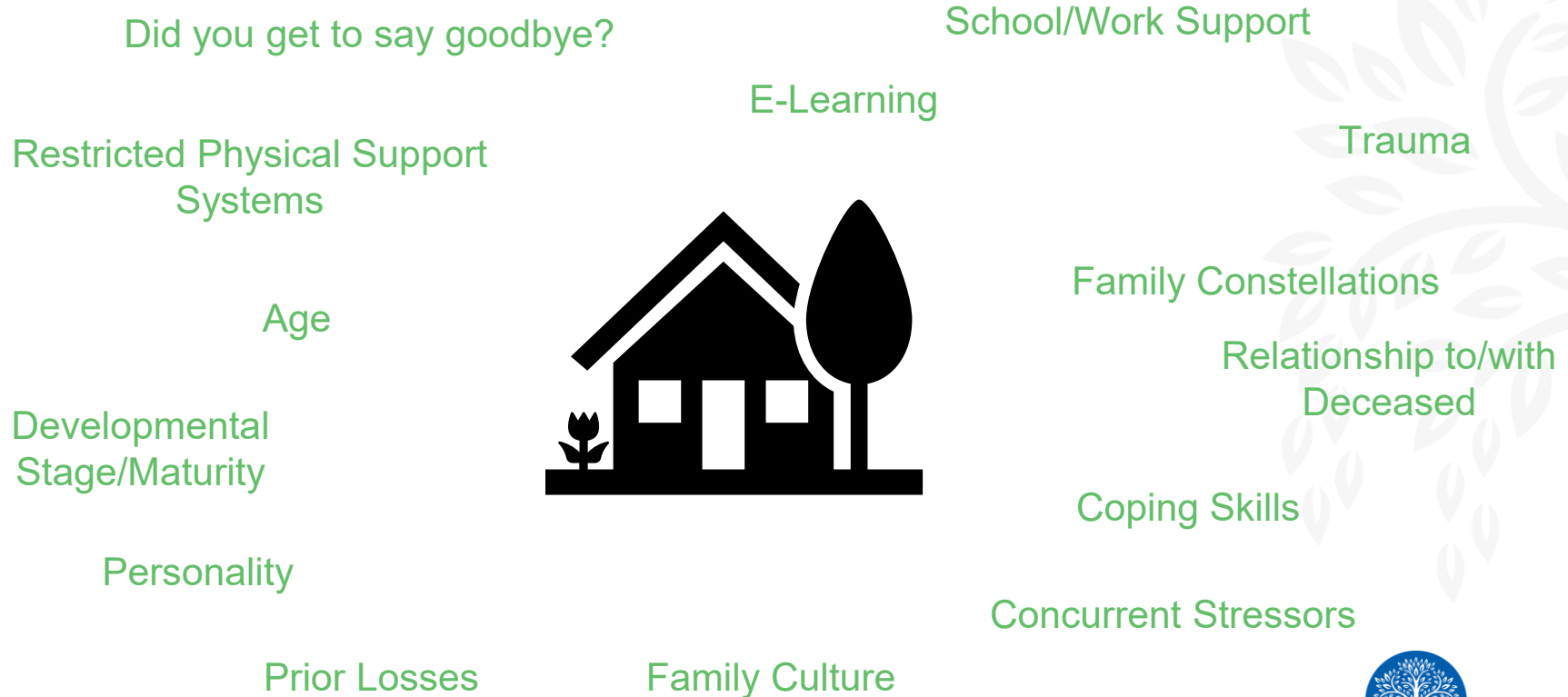
Understanding Grief

Grief is a whole person response to actual or threatened loss, or separation, from anything to which we are psychologically attached. It is **natural** and **normal**. It is not a disease.

- Grief is individualized and unique to each person
- Grief is transitional
- Grief is both seen and unseen
- Grief is a shared experience
- Grief is integral



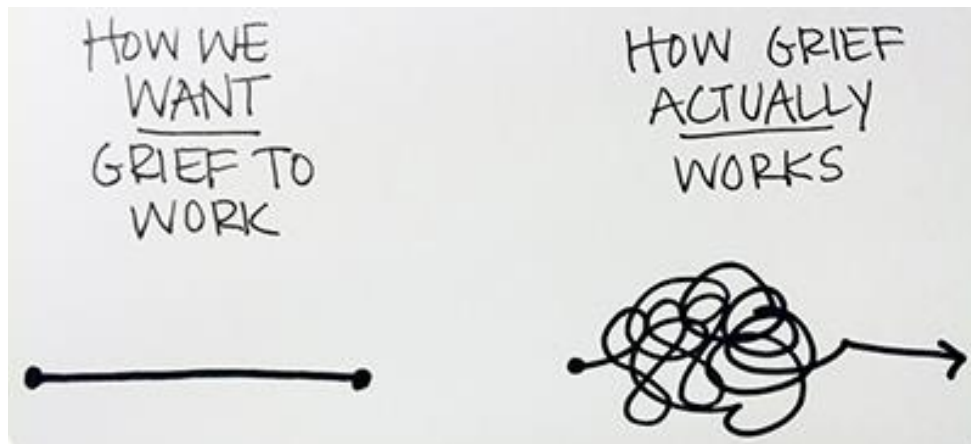
Grief is Multi-Factorial



Myths and Misperceptions

What are some common myths and misperceptions that we hear/learn about grief?

- The experience of grief has orderly stages
- People should avoid topics that cause a the griever to cry



Secondary Losses

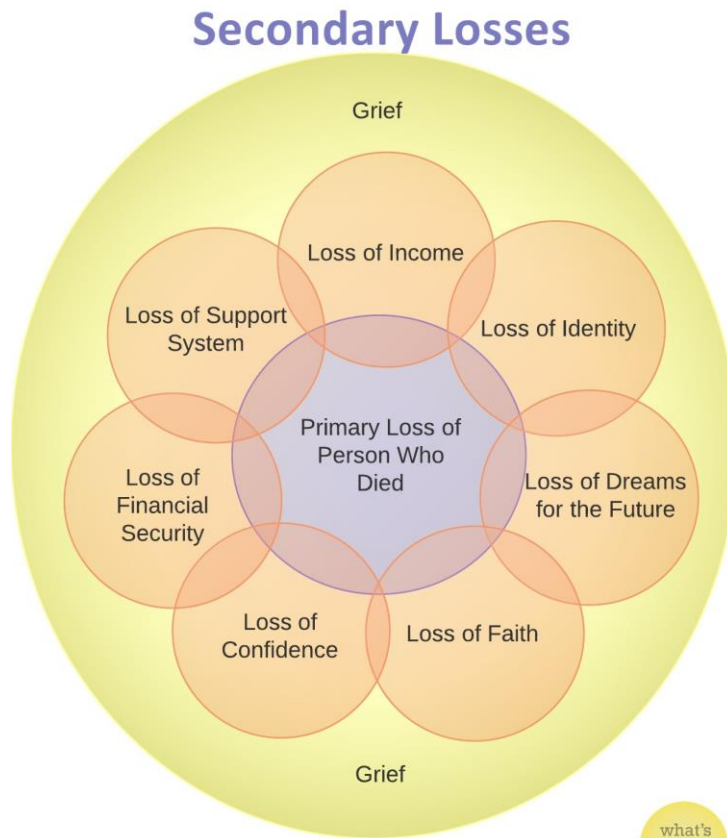
When someone experiences the death of a loved one, they have experienced multiple losses

Three broad areas of losses:

Loss of Self

Loss of Security

Loss of Meaning



<http://whatsyourgrief.com>

what's
your
grief?

Non-death Losses

Losing connections to ourselves and our world during a time of crisis

Possible non-death losses

- Loss of job/finances
- Losing plans for the future
- Sense of Safety after tragedy
- Divorce
- Sudden changes in living situation
- Deployment
- Incarceration
- Infertility
- Loss of culture, language

Common Grief Reactions

Common Grief Reactions

You have the right to feel what you are feeling

- Shock / Apparent Lack of Feelings
- Physiological Changes
- Panic
- Anger
- Blame
- Fear
- Guilt
- Relief
- Sadness

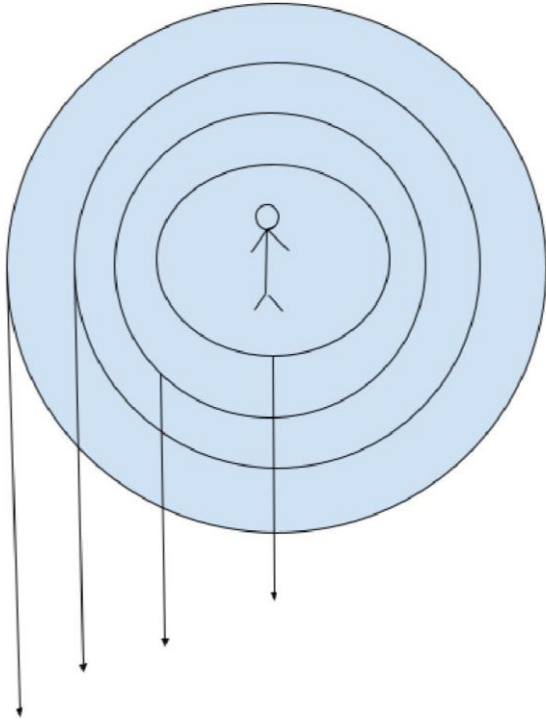


Common Grief Reactions Continued

You have the right to feel what you are feeling

- You may feel eager to be working, to be connected to others who share the same loss
- You may feel apprehensive about working, feeling distracted and disorganized
- You may find yourself daydreaming or unable to concentrate on projects that require your full attention
- This grief may trigger other losses in your life
- You may be comforted when your co-worker is back in the office or you may feel apprehensive about seeing them

Create boundaries



What are the things that help you to feel centered and grounded?

What are the things that make you feel off balanced?



Be kind to yourself

Being kind to yourself does not mean you are denying your grief. It does not mean you are pitying yourself or being self-indulgent.

"It's all my fault."

"I am doing the best I can."

"I can't do this."

"I show up every day."

"I'm not a good parent."

"My children are loved."

"Things will never get better."

"I will take one thing at a time."

1. Name your feeling
2. Ask, "What unkind words am I saying to myself?"
3. Stop. Picture a stop sign. Take three, slow breaths
4. Think of words of support, comfort and kindness

Let your grief be there

“We are going through a lot. I’m not myself right now.”

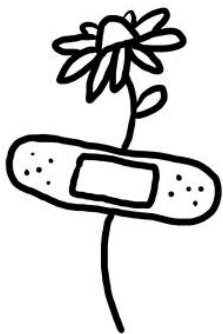
“It’s okay to ask me how I doing.”

“It is really, really bad. It sucks.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I’m just trying to make it through the day.”

“I’m bearing the unbearable.”



Providing Support

Let grief be there...

The journey of grief is disorienting, terrible, messy, weird, awkward, and yes, even beautiful. As impossible as it might seem right now that you and your children/students will survive grief, you can; they can.

We do this through love. Love, love, love.



Supporting Grieving Co-Workers

What can I do and say to provide support?

- Listen
- Validate and Normalize
- Be Present and Authentic
- Allow stories to be shared
- Acknowledge their loss. Do not avoid them
- Saying, “Let me know what I can do for you” can be too ambiguous
- Offer specific, concrete assistance in or out of the workplace
- Be sensitive to Co-Worker’s cues
 - Body language, eye contact, engagement

Listen & Support

Provide an opportunity for the grieving person to tell their story

- Do say
 - I am so very sorry about the death of your _____
 - I am here to listen any time you feel like talking.
 - I care about you and want to support you in any way that feels comfortable to you.
 - I'm holding you and your family in my thoughts
 - Do say the name of the person who died
 - Speak from your heart!

Listen & Support

- Things to avoid
 - Excessively ask how your co-worker is doing. Try to keep interactions as normal as possible
 - Give advice unless it is asked for
 - Use platitudes such as “They’re in a better place” or “You have to be strong now”
 - The quick fix: The “quick fix” means we immediately jump into problem-solving mode (e.g. “You should do this,” “If I were you I would....”)

Language Matters

Died by Suicide vs. ~~Committed Suicide~~

Suicide vs. ~~Successful Attempt~~

Suicide Attempt vs. ~~Unsuccessful Attempt~~

Working with vs. ~~Dealing with a Suicidal Person~~

Describe Behavior vs. ~~Manipulative/Attention-Seeking~~

Looking at the present

The story of now

- The facts remain, but the *meaning* of the loss can change
- “Stories of loss are also stories about lives.” – Hope Edelman



Share Stories and Feelings

Provide an opportunity for the grieving person to tell their story

- How did you find out that the person died?
- What did you do when you found out?
- How did you feel?
- How do you feel now?
- Do not dismiss any feelings/emotions but rather be prepared to hear tough feelings
- Provide a safe and non-judgement space. Sometimes people will not need prompting questions and will share the story openly.

Looking at the future

Sometimes we “outgrow” and craft a new story of loss, one that might feel richer, more detailed, deeper, calmer. This can happen naturally, or with intention.



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

Coping Skills

What is a Coping Skill?

An action or activity that you can do in response to a difficult or challenging emotion. This activity can help us to feel better or calm down.

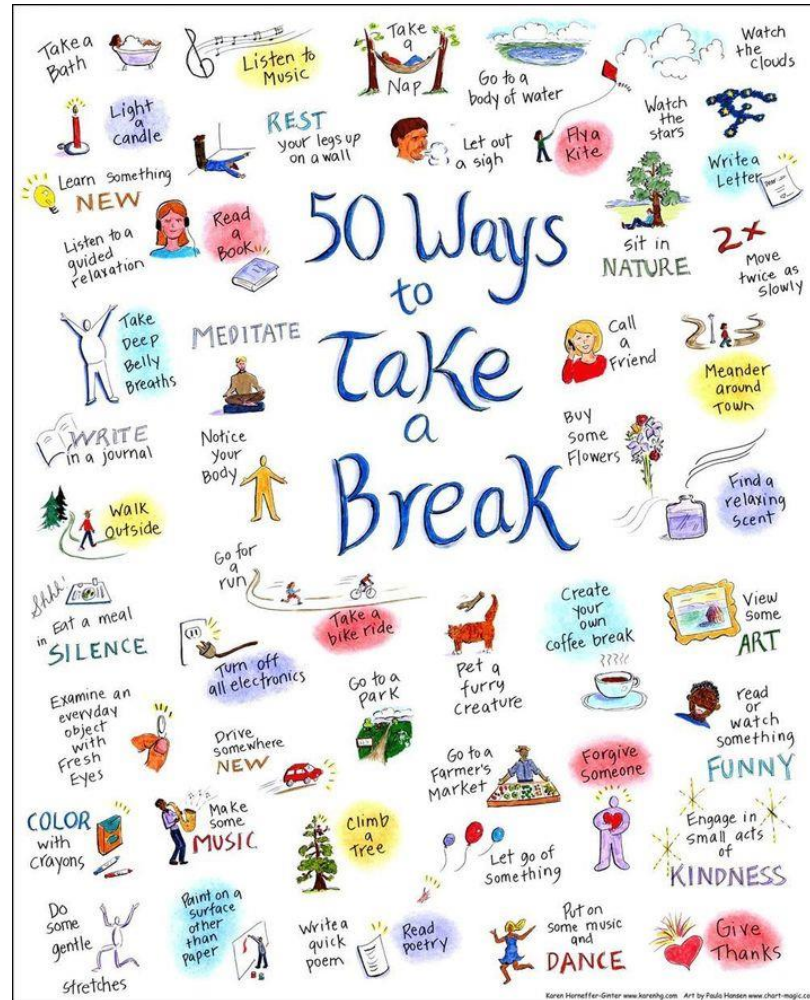
Identify coping skills that you can do related to your feelings

- Art and Journaling
- Exercise
- Mindfulness/breathing
- Enjoyable activities
- Spending time with family and friends
- Talking with co-workers

Self-Care

Grief is Hard!

- Take care of you to best take care of others
- Take breaks when you can
- Find routine for yourself



-Have a plan in place/point person to go to when feeling upset

-Practice self-care throughout the day

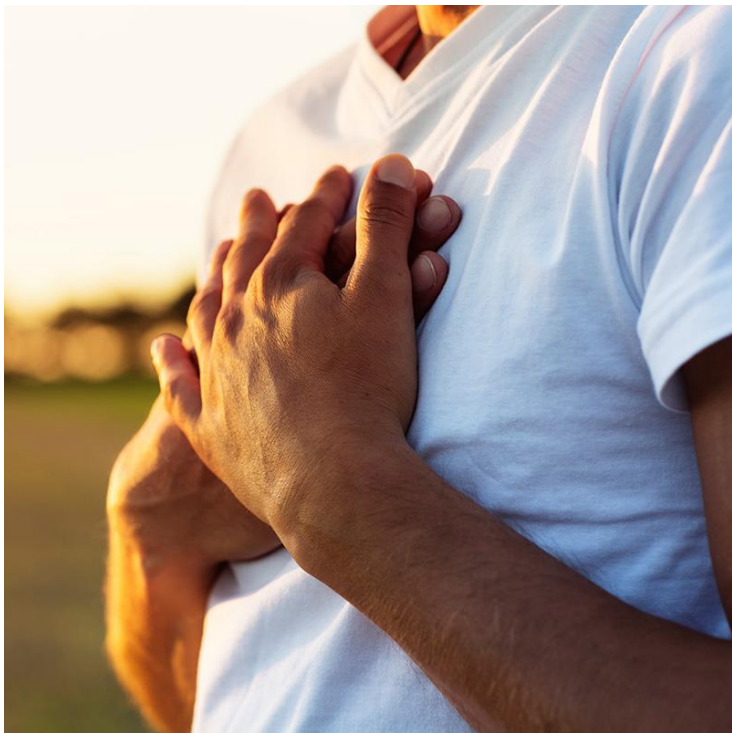
Continuing Bonds

We Bond Through...

Memory
Legacy
Shared experiences
Senses
Intuitive knowing
Prayer
Guided imagery
Music
Food
Dreams
Cherishing
Forgiveness
Dialogue



Pause and check-in with yourself



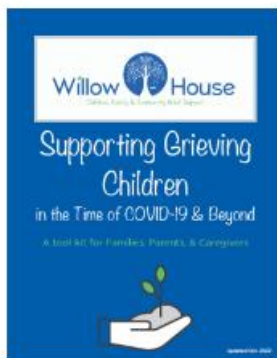
What is the state of my heart today? What is in my heart?

Center yourself. Breathe. See what image appears, without changing it. Write about or draw what comes up for you. Don't rush.

Resources: www.willowhouse.org

Downloadable Resources

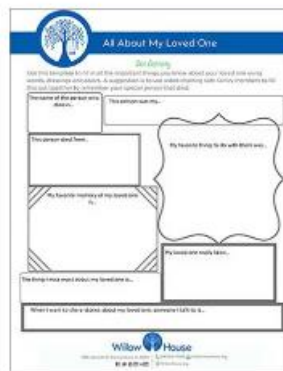
Explore these resources and educational materials for mental health and school professionals. These resources can benefit all ages who are grieving and all types of loss.



Supporting Children Toolkit



Doug Center



Google drive of activities

Grief Resources ▼

For Families

For Professionals

VIEW MORE RESOURCES

Sources

1 *Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM)*, The Judi's House/JAG Institute, 2022.

2 *USDHHS*, Bureau of the Census

3 National Principals Association

4 Rainbows, UK

5 Center for Disease Control

6 Hamilton's Academy for Grief and Loss

7 Alan Wolfelt, "Healing The Bereaved Child"

8 *50 Ways to Take a Break* by Karen Horneffer-Ginter, Ph.D

9 The Dougy Center for Grieving Children



Thank you!

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