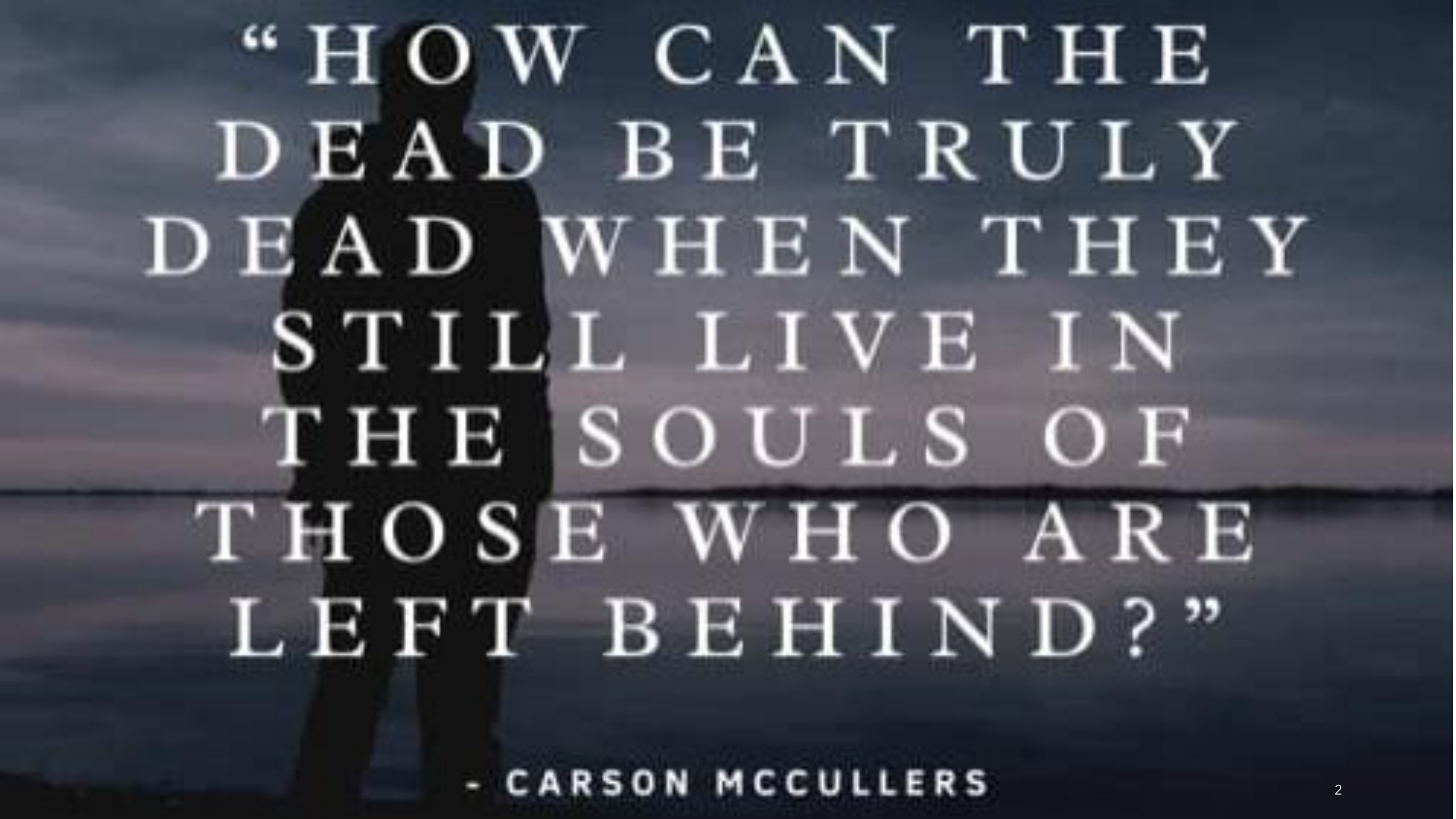


How To Talk To Your Children About Grief

Ms. S. McPherson-Berg

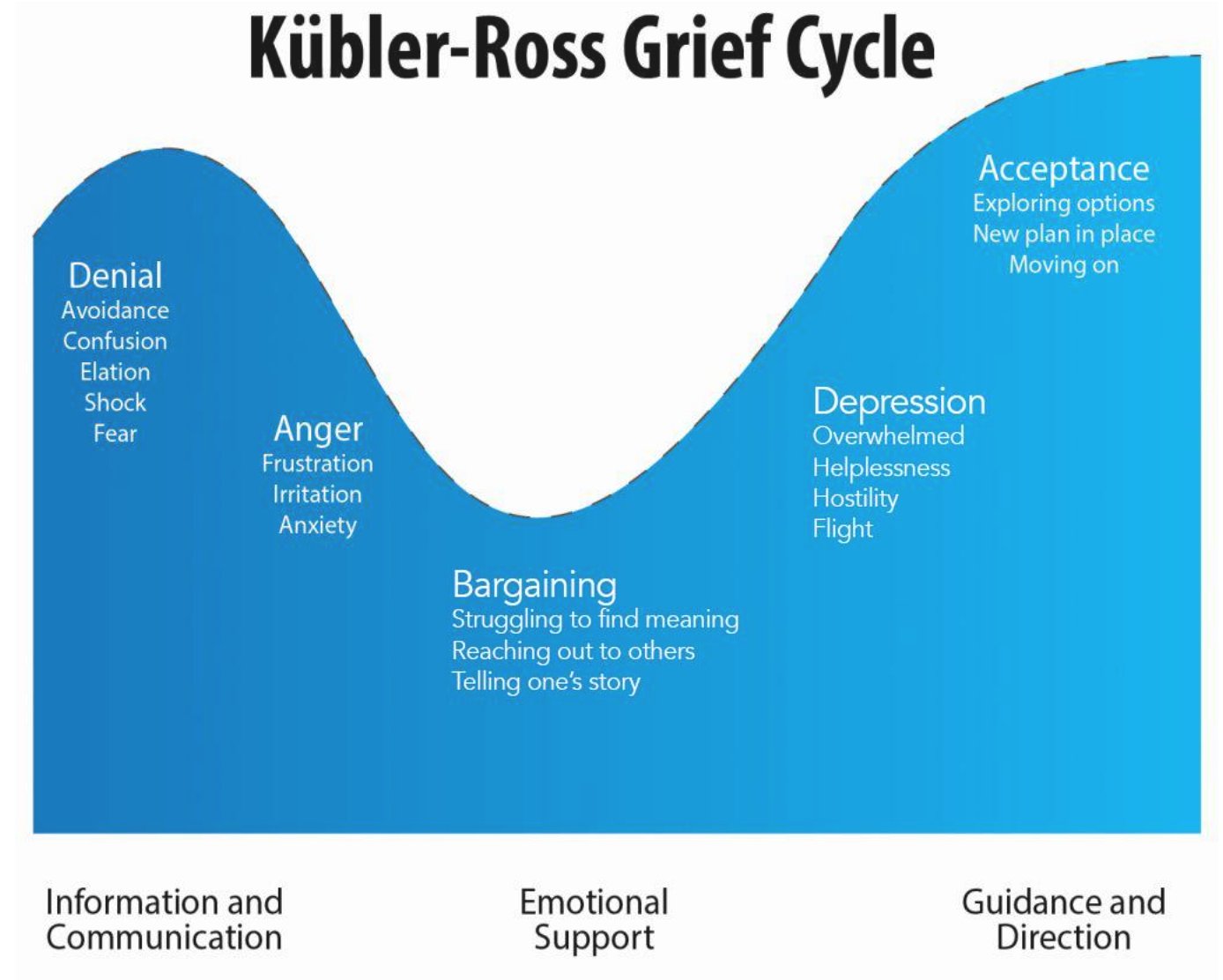
A silhouette of a person stands on a beach, looking out at the ocean under a cloudy sky. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right. The ocean stretches across the middle ground, and the horizon is visible in the distance. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

“HOW CAN THE
DEAD BE TRULY
DEAD WHEN THEY
STILL LIVE IN
THE SOULS OF
THOSE WHO ARE
LEFT BEHIND?”

- CARSON MCCULLERS

Five Stages of Grief:

- The order of each stage depends on the child who is grieving. The child may go to one stage and go back and forth between stages often.



Denial:

Avoidance

Confusion

Elation

Shock

Fear

- This takes place because your life as you knew it has changed. You may wish that what you know did not happen. It is a defense mechanism in your body.

Anger:

Feelings:



Frustration



Irritation



Anxiety

Responses/Thoughts

- This is another response to the death of a loved one
- You may think that life is not fair
- You may feel vulnerable
- You may feel like your life is out of control
- Your child may have some of the same feelings at the same or a different time

Bargaining:

(May or may not take place)



Struggling to find meaning



Reaching out to others



Telling one's story

- You may want to get your life back
- You may want a miracle to take place to bring your loved one back to life
- You may want to make a deal to change the loss that you are experiencing

Depression:

You may feel:

- Overwhelmed
- Helpless
- Hostile
- The need for flight; like you want to leave the situation
- You may withdraw from life
- You may feel numb
- You may feel like you are in a fog
- You may not want to be around others
- You may have feelings of hopelessness



Acceptance:



Exploring
options



New plan in
place



Moving
forward

- You learn to live with the loss of your loved one
- You have a new reality that your loved one is not coming back
- You start to see friends again
- You have more good days than bad days

What helps?



Tell your child the truth:

It minimizes confusion:

Children who are not told the truth often fill in the blanks themselves

They may think that they somehow caused the death

It is better to hear it from a trusted adult rather than social media or gossip

Recognizing the symptoms of grief:



Crying

Headaches

Difficulty
Sleeping

Questioning
the purpose of
life

Symptoms of grief:



Questioning your spiritual beliefs



Having feelings of detachment



Loss of Appetite

Symptoms of
grief:

Frustration

Guilt

Fatigue

Anger

Stress

Aches /Pains

Listening:



Take the time to listen to what your child says



Notice their body language/what is not being said



Respond in language that s/he can understand

- Example:
- “You get really upset when your friends mention...”
- Talking about it will help you get the feelings out”

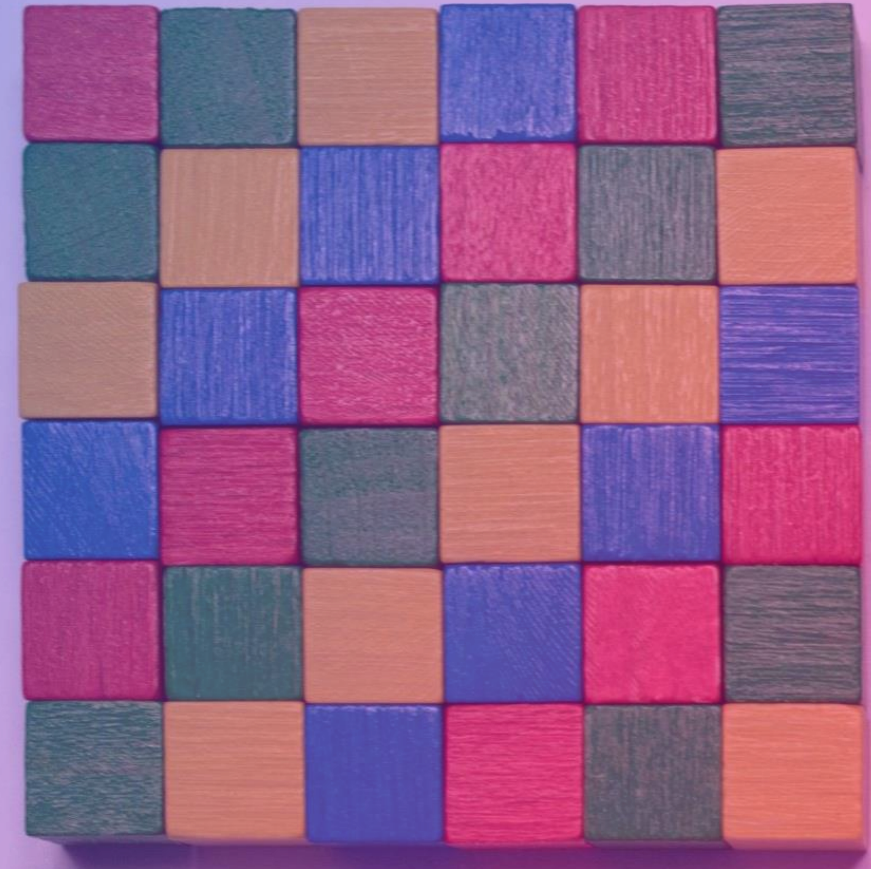
Choices

You may want to offer:

- “Do you want cold cereal or hot cereal today?”
- “What type of fruit do you want to buy?”
- “What game would you like to play during family game night?”

Spaces for play and creativity:

- Give your child time to:
- Play
- Draw
- Color
- Write in a journal
- Build with blocks/Legos



Routines and Consistency:

Try your best:

- Keep your routines surrounding:
 - Breakfast
 - Getting to school
 - After-school activities
 - Bedtime (they may need extra time/care)

Developing a way to remember the person who died:

- Let your child lead you:
 - Your child may have an idea of how s/he wants to remember the person who died
 - Your child may need some suggestions:
 - writing
 - drawing
 - planting seeds, a bush, a tree etc.

Take a break:

Coping skill:

Do activities that bring you joy

Find new activities that relax you

Find activities where you and your child can bond

Find activities where your child can develop a new skill

Funerals, memorials, celebrations of life:

- Your child may wish to:
 - Be included in selecting items for the funeral
 - The clothing of your loved one
 - They may wish to plant a tree, seeds, or a bush to commemorate their loved one

Support at school:



- Remember:
 - The school has counselors, deans, psychologists, social workers to speak with your child
 - The Family Center is available to have counselors speak with your child

Address the stigma:

- You can say:
 - This is uncomfortable for most people to talk about, but we can get through this tough time together

Get assistance if needed:

- Consider reaching out to a:
- Counselor/Guidance Counselor
- Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Even if you have not tried this before



Ask for referrals:

Copies are available here at the presentation

Answer questions honestly:

- Children learn through asking questions
- It shows that they are curious about things they don't understand
- Tell them that it's okay to ask questions
- Tell them the truth about how the person dies (use age- appropriate language for your child)
- Use the word “died” and not other terms

Give children choices:

- Children appreciate choices
- Give them an opportunity to say goodbye to the person who has died
- Different ways to say goodbye:
 - Assisting with selecting the casket, clothing, flowers
 - Speaking at the service
 - Having them write something to be read at the service

If the child chooses not to attend services:

- Some children may want something that reminds them about the person who died
- Some children do not want reminders around them; speak with them about what works for them
- Remember each of your children is different
- For the child who elects not to have keepsakes from the person who died, you may want to put something aside for him or her if there is a change in the future

What to say instead:

Past:

➤ “You must be...”



■ Present:

➤ “How is your grief today/how is it affecting you?”

➤ I appreciate all that you’ve shared with me

➤ “At least...”



➤ What has it been like for you?

What to say instead:

- Past:

- “It’s all part of a bigger plan”



- Present:

- “I am here to listen”

- “I know how you feel”



- “What has it been like for you?”

What to say instead:

Past:

“You’re strong”



■ Present:

➤ “You went back to school, how was that?”

“Don’t feel that way”



➤ “You seem like you are struggling with your feelings, I’m here if you want to share more”

What to say instead:

Past:

- “They would want you to be happy/They would be so proud of you”



Present:

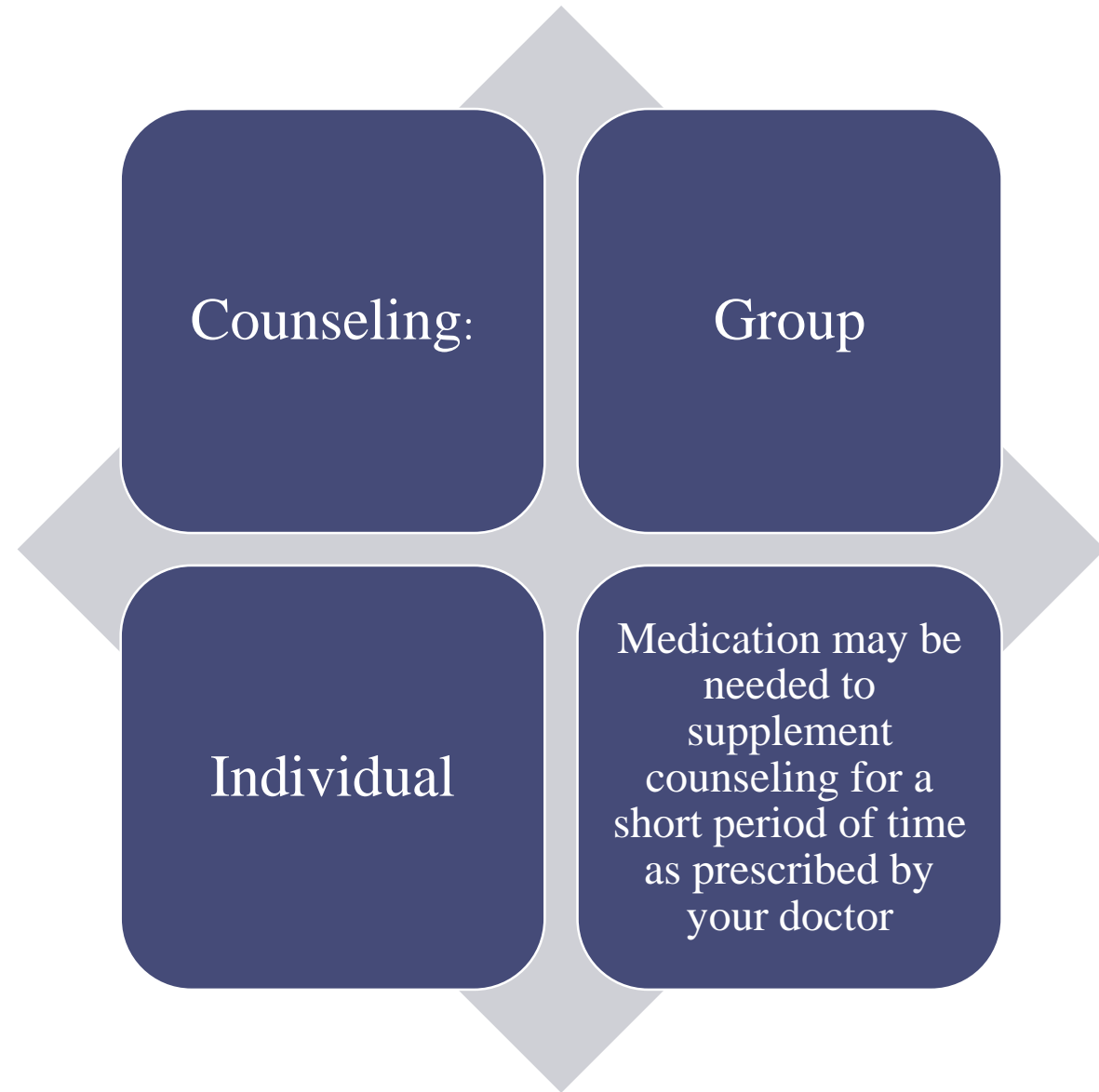
- “I’m so proud of you for -----
. What do you think -----would say if s/he were here?”

- “Let me know if there is anything I can do”



- “I’m on my way to the supermarket, can I pick up something for you? I know you like juice boxes, why don’t I grab a few packs for you.”

Treatment:



The background is split into two vertical panels. The left panel has a purple-to-pink gradient and is filled with many overlapping, semi-transparent question marks. The right panel is dark grey and filled with many overlapping, 3D-style question marks that have a slight metallic sheen.

Questions?

thank you