



Toronto Institute
Of Group Studies

Canada Day Reflections, July 2025



Every Monday morning our team meets with the explicit goal of attending to the business of TIGS. As it turns out, the implicit goal of connecting with each other and making meaning of our experience of life is what fuels our motivation and fortifies our commitment to each other and to group leadership training.

Each year we choose a theme to explore in our academic offerings, and this past year our theme was *rupture and repair*. We had rich conversations on this topic and were challenged to think beyond polarities, to recognize *nuance* and to embrace the *paradox* of being able to hold more than one idea/feeling/concept at the same time. In a recent meeting, as we pondered the question of what comes after repair, the theme of *grief*, both personal and collective, emerged in our group. Grieving what was lost in the process of rupture and mourning what we will not *receive* are fundamental components of repair.

This newsletter invites all of you into our reflections and shares the resources we have found helpful. As always, we hope you will find some food for thought in these resources and that most of all, you will find some resonance and feel less alone.

Newsletter 13: Collective Grief

REFLECTING ON OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSES

Loaves and Fishes

*This is not
the age of information.*

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the age of information.*

*Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.*

*This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.*

*People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.*

*from The House of Belonging
by David Whyte*

Our Canadian Identity:

As Canadians, the polarized socio-political climate of our time and resultant rupture with our closest ally, has made us all experience a greater level of intimacy with grief. The loss of trust, and felt sense of security and friendship, have impacted us both individually and nationally. As a nation, navigating this rupture has fostered the emergence of a louder sense of collective patriotism and connecting with each other as Canadians.

Perhaps our increased patriotism can be understood as a reaction to political polarization. At the most recent AGPA Connect, Dr. Tania Israel delivered [The Mitchell Hochberg Memorial Public Lecture, *Healing Tribal Division: The Problem and Promise of Group Dynamics in a Polarized Society*, March 8, 2025](#). In her talk, she suggested that reactions to political polarizations are, “exacerbated by in-group/out-group dynamics that lead us to feel protective of our people and threatened by others. As political identities interact with our cognitive biases, we fear, mistrust, and distance ourselves from people whose views, values, and votes do not align with our own.” Dr. Israel’s inspirational lecture highlighted that group leaders/therapists with our understanding of group dynamics and commitment to helping people grow in difficult conflict-ridden situations are perfectly suited to help heal tribal divisions.

During this time, we noted that it was significant to witness the arrival of Canada’s King and Queen, King Charles and Queen Camilla on May 26th, 2025, to officially open our Parliament (May 27th, 2025), following our recent Canadian election. Given events of the moment, this symbolic visit offered Canadians an important opportunity

to reflect on our Canadian identity, which has come into the fore in recent months with threats to our sovereignty.

What felt so striking to us during the review of these events was a discussion on CBC with host Adrienne Arseneault, who reflected that *Democracy is a verb. And Remembrance is a verb.* Both require effort and action and cannot be taken for granted.

In celebration of what it means to be Canadian, author and historian [Wade Davis](#) wrote the following incredible piece for *Canadian Geographic's 'This is Canada' series*, titled, *North Star: Reflections on Canada and being Canadian.*

<https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/north-star-reflections-on-canada-and-being-canadian/>

You can read the whole series in the [July/August 2025](#) issue, or at the [link here](#).

"Over the years, Canada's vast geography and diverse communities have given rise to a bounty of unique words and expressions. For more than 20 years, Sali Tagliamonte, a University of Toronto professor of linguistics, and her research team have been exploring [our] linguistic diversity..." University of Toronto Magazine, January 23rd, 2025.

You can take their quiz here to see how well you know these 'Canadian-isms':

<https://magazine.utoronto.ca/research-ideas/culture-society/canadian-words-quiz/>

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*"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.*

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

*People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.*

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep."

Jalaluddin Rumi

In these unsettling times, the mourning of connection and safety with trusted allies is resulting in global polarization. Collective grief is a shared emotional experience that can bring a community together. To cope with collective grief, there may also be a devaluing of the other or an idealization of what has been lost. Rumi encourages us to move beyond the human tendency for dualistic thinking (good vs bad, right vs wrong, you vs me), and instead invites us to meet in the in-between space, a field of connection and understanding where labels are no longer relevant. This is a space of unity and acceptance without judgment, in which we can embrace our sense of oneness and connection rather than focus on conflict. In a parallel process, group therapy encourages members to enter a shared contained space with safe boundaries in which we can co-create a new narrative in the present moment. In this intersubjective field, we can notice our similarities among our differences, and focus on our fundamental commonality, the human experience. In group, we invite members to move beyond societal judgment and moralistic views, and shift toward an experience of vulnerability and openness in a space in which we embrace our imperfections within a shared new experience, leading to deeper emotional connections and stronger bonds, where our "worlds touch."

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For our May TIGS Conversation, we were honored to welcome [Nimer Said](#), clinical psychologist, organizational consultant, and member of the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA), for a moving and insightful discussion titled [*Pathways through Enmity: My Journey of Longing and Belonging*](#).

Speaking from his experience living in Israel and working at the intersection of psychology and conflict, Nimer offered a deeply human perspective on navigating trauma, identity, and reconciliation. His work with the [International Dialogue Initiative \(IDI\)](#) – a multidisciplinary group of psychoanalysts, diplomats, and scholars – has focused on bringing psychological understanding to societal conflict. As Nimer shared, a key aspect of this work is helping people make meaning of their suffering and engage in dialogue across divides.

Throughout the conversation, Nimer emphasized the transformative potential of shared experiences like grief and longing. He spoke to the challenge and importance of *being with oneself* and *being present with the other*—a process of remaining grounded and open, even in the face of polarization and pain.

This powerful session was a reminder of the depth, courage, and compassion required to pursue understanding in divided times.

 Watch the full conversation here:

 [Conversation with Nimer Said](#)

Cultural Responses to Grief:

There is no question we are living in a time of great transition. Many of the cultural institutions that previously provided certainty in our lives are now being dismantled and even discarded. The extent and pace of this massive cultural change seems to have outstripped our capacity to adapt and integrate the new and as a result, for many there is intense anxiety and a loss of a felt sense of safety. Feeling unsafe inevitably leads us to be inflexible in our thinking and to close our boundaries to the 'other', resulting in polarization and ever-increasing isolation. It feels helpful to name the grief that many of us are experiencing, as we witness and experience this loss of connection with others and with ourselves.

Journalist and TV host, [Anderson Cooper](#) has spent his career documenting political upheaval and trauma but maintains that until recently he had little or no conscious connection with the grief he held as a result of bearing witness to these tragedies and also experiencing several profound personal losses, including his father's death at age 10, and his brother's death by suicide when he was 21. He describes how his grief began to bubble to the surface recently as he began sorting through his mother's belongings after her death. His curiosity about his experience catalyzed an in-depth journey into the subject of grief via his popular podcast, [All There Is with Anderson Cooper](#), which is a collection of compelling conversations with people who've had a close acquaintance with grief. In one of the early episodes, author and psychotherapist Frances Weller suggests, "we must honour our losses, or they become like a sediment that weighs us down and disconnects us from others." On the other hand, opening to our grief and sharing it with others helps us bear the unbearable and connect at the most human level.

We highly recommend Francis Weller's beautiful book about grief:

[Francis Weller \(2015\) *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*. California: North Atlantic Books.](#)

Recent advances in neuroscience are highlighting that grief is not only an emotional/psychological experience but also a neurobiological one. [The Scientific](#)

[American article, "How the brain copes with grief" \(2024\)](#) examines grief from an attachment neurobiology lens based on the work of Dr. Mary-Frances O'Connor. Using neuroimaging studies to identify the biological mechanisms underlying grief, Dr. O'Connor explains how insight into brain circuits and neurotransmitters can enable us to navigate grief with self-compassion.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-brain-cope-with-grief/>

[Nick Cave: A Journey Through Grief, Faith, Community, Rupture and Repair](#)

Coming of age in late-1970s Australia, Nick Cave first gained prominence as the frontman of the post-punk band The Birthday Party. After the group disbanded in 1983, he formed Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, who would go on to become one of the most influential bands in alternative music. Moving to England in the early 1980s, Cave quickly developed a reputation as one of the most charismatic frontmen and thoughtful songwriters of his generation. His performances were often confrontational, breaking the fourth wall to create intense and immediate connections with his audience.

Throughout much of the 1980s, Cave's songwriting focused on themes of good and evil, influenced by gothic literature, biblical imagery, and personal turmoil. In the 1990s, his work became more introspective and melodic, as he increasingly engaged with New Testament themes and wrote quieter, piano-driven songs, such as those on *The Boatman's Call* (1997).

Tragedy deeply marked Cave's later life and career. In 2015, his 15-year-old son Arthur died in a tragic accident in Brighton, England. Seven years later, in 2022, his 31-year-old son Jethro also passed away. Reflecting on these losses in an interview with *The Big Issue*, Cave said:

"We change, sometimes multiple times, shattered by events. This can fundamentally change the way that you perceive the world and the way you behave."

These profound losses reshaped Cave's music and public persona. In the past decade, his songwriting has taken on themes of grief, love, and transcendence. He has also become an outspoken figure on grief and healing, fostering dialogue with his audience through live events and online platforms.

One such platform is *The Red Hand Files*, an open forum that Cave began in response to letters he received after Arthur's death. What began as personal correspondence evolved into a public dialogue, where fans could "ask him anything." Cave found comfort and meaning in these exchanges, often remarking on the generosity and

vulnerability of those who wrote to him. In turn, his responses have become a source of solace and philosophical reflection for many.

In a poignant interview with Stephen Colbert, Cave traced his journey from a post-punk provocateur to a man shaped by empathy, grief, and faith. He identified Arthur's death as a turning point—not just in his personal life but in his artistic and public presence. He described a transformation from skepticism to belief, from a worldview marked by contempt to one increasingly characterized by compassion and hope.

Cave recalled how the outpouring of support after Arthur's death offered him a choice: to turn inward or to open himself to others. He chose the latter. This decision paved the way for a mutual exchange of support and understanding between Cave and his community of fans. Through *The Red Hand Files*, people have shared stories of loss, asked life's most difficult questions, and received Cave's thoughtful, deeply felt replies.

In the Colbert interview, Cave read a letter from a mother concerned that her negativity might harm her young son. Cave's response acknowledged that it took "a devastation" for him to fully grasp life's fragility. He described hope as "a warrior emotion that lays waste to cynicism," emphasizing that hopefulness is not passive, but something earned through struggle. His advice to the letter writer was tender and simple - grounded in the wisdom of lived experience.

Cave's journey reminds us that transformation is possible—and that through pain, we can find grace.

 Watch the Full Interview:

[Nick Cave on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert](#)

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*"Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in..."
Leonard Cohen*

THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTION

Priya Parker, author of *The Art of Gathering*, writes about collective grief in her recent newsletter article, *How to hold collective grief*, (March 2025). In it, she highlights the fact that we weren't meant to carry this alone. *"We are living through a time of massive, unacknowledged collective grief. And we have neither the language nor the rituals to process what it is we're going through."* Her article highlights lessons learned from her conversation with *Carla Fernandez*, author of *Renegade Grief: A Guide to the Wild Ride of Life After Loss*.

You can access the full newsletter article here:

<https://www.priyaparker.com/art-of-gathering-newsletter/grieve-together-now#>

This theme is reinforced by *Dan Harris (10% Happier)* who suggests we make Anxiety a 'team sport'!

"In the midst of movement and chaos, keep stillness inside of you."
Deepak Chopra

In the January 2025 edition of the *University of Toronto Magazine*, Scott Anderson interviews Ian Williams about *The Lost Art of Conversation*, and its significance in our times.

"In his book, *What I Mean to Say: Remaking Conversation in Our Time (2024)*, Ian Williams, a professor of English at the University of Toronto, argues that polarized politics and online echo chambers are devaluing how we speak - and listen - to each other. In this Q&A with editor-in-chief Scott Anderson, he reflects on the importance of conversation to the human spirit, the challenge of listening in a distracted world and the role universities can play in elevating the tone of debate."

You can listen to this inspiring conversation here:

<https://magazine.utoronto.ca/people/faculty-staff/lost-art-of-conversation/>

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR READERS:

We have been meeting over the past year with our alumnae community and are looking forward to introducing and implementing many of their thoughtful ideas and recommendations. One such recommendation was to add a section in our newsletter for our readers to contribute to. If you'd like to add your contribution, we invite you to

submit your recommendations and a brief synopsis of any readings or podcasts you'd like to share with our group community to admin@tigs.co

In response to our recent conversations and discussions about polarization and repair, one of our community members, Clarice L. Belcher, Atlanta, GA, a Language of Compassion facilitator of workshops and practice groups since 2012, submitted the following recommendation about Marshall Rosenberg's work:

"In his seminal work, [*Nonviolent Communication*](#), Dr. Marshall Rosenberg offers a radically different way of speaking our truths without wounding others, offering four components of a language of compassion that include feelings and needs. For many, there is a great deal of confusion between the two. One might say, for example, *I feel that was unfair* or *I feel you are mean* but neither statement names a specific feeling. They name a judgment or an interpretation instead. Similarly, one might say *I need a better relationship*, or *I need a better job* but neither statement names a need. They name a strategy instead. Aware of the confusion we have among feelings, needs, and strategies, Dr. Rosenberg's work clarifies each one, offering lists of feelings and needs.

In groups where individuals are encouraged to name their feelings and needs, they are empowered to show up vulnerably, connecting more deeply to themselves and to others, as feelings and needs are universal, shared by everyone. In so doing, there is less chaos, less conflict, and less drama, as they cease to rush to strategies but consider their needs first, letting the needs define the strategies. Applying this to empathy is equally helpful, as one group member offers another a safe space to explore feelings and needs by guessing them, asking *Are you feeling scared? Do you have a need for safety?* These questions invite the individual to shift from head to heart. The subsequent silence and sighing the individual experiences are hallmarks of a deep connection as they explore what is alive in them, often discovering what they had not before and showing up whole rather than half."

[Marshall R. Rosenberg, Ph.D., *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*](#)
Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press, 2003.

OUR COMMUNITY

We were delighted to see so many of our trainees, alumnae, and group community members at this year's American Group Psychotherapy Association's annual conference, *AGPA Connect 2025* in San Francisco this past March. The photo below was taken at this year's 'Cannuck' dinner.



We are pleased and proud to share that Melissa Gansner, an alumnus from our Comprehensive Training Program, was the inaugural recipient of The Smith Giesbrecht Canadian Scholarship. This scholarship is funded by our esteemed faculty member Joan-Dianne Smith and her husband James Giesbrecht in memory of their son, David Smith Giesbrecht.

This Scholarship supports a Canadian therapist (with preference to those involved with the Toronto Institute of Group Studies) who demonstrates a commitment to group therapy as a life-long career focus. It will include two sequential years of attendance at AGPA Connect, travel support, and a stipend for supervision and/or consultation during the interlude between the two conferences. For more information about this award, please visit the AGPA website: www.agpa.org
Congratulations Melissa!

We would also like to highlight that the Psychotherapy Practice Research Network (PPRNet) continues to offer psychotherapy providers working with adult clients free training and consultations to repair therapeutic ruptures. Participating providers may be at any stage of their career and of any theoretical orientation. This is a unique opportunity to receive state-of-the-art training and personalized consultation that may count as continuing professional education hours with your regulatory college. Please visit <https://researchpprnet.ca/> for more information.

PPRNet is a Canada-wide inter-disciplinary collaboration among psychotherapy clinicians, educators, researchers, knowledge users, and professional organizations. Their newsletter often includes timely and accessible updates regarding new group

psychotherapy research. Director Giorgio Tasca is one of our respected invited Faculty.

Another recommendation from our alumnae community was to include a section in the newsletter that highlights *good news*. So again, we invite you to share 'good news' stories or hopeful, meaningful experiences that help generate positive energy with us at admin@tigs.co

"There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."
Edith Wharton

The image below was taken in 2005 in Rajasthan, India. The hall was covered in mosaics of glass and mirror which were designed in such a way that if a single candle was lit at the end of the hall, the light would be reflected through the full length of the passage and illuminate the entire space.

What an incredible metaphor for our times!



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The theme we have chosen for our offerings for the 2025-2026 academic year is *Living with Uncertainty*.

"An open mind leaves a chance for someone to drop a worthwhile thought in it."
Mark Twain

Thank you for being part of our group community. For our Canadian readers, Happy Canada Day! And for our American community members, Happy 4th! We send our best wishes to you all for a restorative summer season ahead!

Respectfully submitted,

Aida Cabecinha, Susan Farrow, Maureen Mahan, Debbie Nacson, Allan Sheps and Terry Simonik, July 2025.