



Improving social support for teenagers with parental loss in secondary school environment

Master Thesis by Nina van der Klauw

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Master Thesis
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Preface

This project was the final stage of my master Design for Interaction at the Technical University of Delft, started in October 2022. It is a 100-day project that took place over the course of seven months.

During this project I immersed myself in the complex world of grief within the secondary school environment. This project brought together my deep interests in mental health and my view point I have on the Dutch school system. In my eyes the Dutch school system is currently too much result-focussed and lacks in stimulating the personal development.

I am grateful for getting the opportunity to complete my masters with this project that is close to my heart. The topic first caught my attention when a dear friend of mine told me her experiences of her parental loss during her school period and the lack of support she experienced in the secondary school environment. After some orientational interviews with experience experts it stood out for me she was not the only one with negative experiences in the secondary education. It sparked my curiosity to further dive into this topic.

The project has been carried out in collaboration with the Design for End of Life lab, that focuses on how design can contribute to the quality of life in its last stage. The focus is not only on the person facing end of life, but also takes its social context into account as friends, family, formal and informal care-givers (End of Life lab, 2022).

Additionally, Rouwnetwerk Jong was be involved throughout the project. This organisation offers a platform specifically for young people with the loss of a loved one. On their website they provide a variety of information about grief and bereavement. Next to that, it facilitates low key peer groups to share experiences and discuss different topics concerning the loss of a loved one (Rouwnetwerk Jong, 2022). Currently, Rouwnetwerk Jong is concentrating on those between the ages of 14 years and 30 years. The majority of the platform users, though, are beyond the age of 18 years. This study may offer suggestions on how their knowledge can be valuable in a school environment.

I have been inspired by the many warm and wonderful individuals I have met while researching this topic. I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who has been involved in the project.

To all the participants who opened up about their experiences with loss, I am deeply grateful for the trust to share such sensitive experiences. Your stories have inspired and motivated this project. School staff, thank you for helping me understand the school environment and for sharing your personal experiences with grief and support within the school.

All the experts involved throughout the project for their enthusiasm and interest in the project. Your expertise in this project brought me a deeper understanding of the topic. Special thanks to Marjan of Humanitas. Your interest and involvement in the different phases of the project gave me confidence in its importance of a design intervention. It was heartwarming to see the support you offer to teenagers. Every teenager deserves a Marjan after losing a loved one.

Marieke and Stefan, thank you for your academic and open-minded approach during the coaching sessions. Your endless enthusiasm and interest in this topic motivated me. You always knew how to expand my perspective by sharing your own didactic experiences. Thanks to Bart for his endless enthusiasm about this topic, which has been a great inspiration to me.

Maureen and Anna, the project shone brightly thanks to the numerous creative sessions we had together throughout the project. Your involvement demonstrates the benefits of collaboration in enhancing quality of a research.

My friends, thank you for always thinking along. Special thanks to Yamila, Anna, Ilse, and Eline for reading along. Additionally, the most important thing you provided me was distraction. My study hours were always more efficient after spending time with you. I truly appreciate the small traditions that formed, like celebrating the small victories with a drink, such as obtaining my green light.

My family, thank you for listening to my endless stories about this project, as I never finished talking about it. I am raised by parents, who are interested in mental health and have social attitudes. I've come to realize that this shaped my own interests and is reflected in this graduation project. Ellen, thank you for your support. You always were available to listen to my thoughts and with your assertative attitude always thought along to find solutions.

Finally, dear reader I hope this project will offer you new perspectives on grief and social support, and inspires you.

Enjoy!

Nina

Executive Summary

This research aims to explore the experiences and needs of social support after the teenager’s parental loss within the secondary school environment and proposes a design intervention.

Teenagers perceive grief more intensely compared to younger ages and adults since it aligns with the rapid transitions of their adolescence. In this vulnerable stage it is important to invest in support to prevent negative consequences on their mental health in the long term. Research stresses the importance of social support for the adaptation of bereavement. Considering the social support, schools are crucial organizations, since teenagers spend a large amount of time there.

The current state

In general, teenagers want to be seen, heard, and acknowledged in their loss. At the same time, they do want to be treated the same as their peers. These ambiguous needs make providing support from the school environment complex. Additionally, the community members, such as teachers and peers, often encounter a lack of experience and knowledge in offering social support.

This research identified that the lack of a protocol or uniform plan results in each teenager perceiving different levels of social support. Also, the

experienced support decreases over time, even though their desire for support remains. Bereaved teenagers often rely on chance encounters with individuals within the educational system, such as mentors, teachers, or peers, to determine whether their desired social support needs will be met. Some teenagers do experience a lack in receiving social support, and feelings may arise that there is no space for grieving in the school environment.

The need

Therefore, teachers, peers, and bereaved teenagers need empowerment to initiate and maintain the social support. A design intervention should provide clear pathways to highlight opportunities for support and offer guidance in having supportive interactions.

The design focus

The primary focus of the design is to offer tools to community health workers in order to enhance the social support network in school. This involves facilitating opportunities for bereaved teenagers to easily connect within the school with preferred school staff, the natural helpers. Natural helpers are members of a community to whom other network members naturally turn to for advice, support and other types of aid. The natural helper has thereby their own support from

other community health workers within the school, the school social workers, empowering them to offer support.

The design

As a result of the design process, the card set called Handreiking Rouw was developed. The toolbox, provided to the teenager by the school after the loss of a parent, contains a variety of cards presenting feelings, needs, experiences, and suggestions.

Handreiking makes it easier for bereaved teenagers to communicate with natural helpers by providing them with low-key options to get in touch with particular staff members. The toolkit also provides schools with a consistent approach to support bereaved teenagers. This involves providing mentors with instructions on how to welcome these teenagers, enabling teachers to have an empathic understanding of parental loss, and establishing a support network within the school for natural helpers that enables them to provide support to bereaved teenagers.

An extensive evaluation with the involved stakeholders and experts with different backgrounds showed the potential of the design for enhancing social support within the school environment. However, future research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of enhancing social support.



Glossary

Bereavement

Refers to the state of having experienced the loss of a loved one.

Death literacy

A set of knowledge and skills known as “death literacy” enables people to understand and act upon end-of-life and death care options.

Grief

Grief is used to refer to our emotional reactions to any significant loss, not just losses due to the death of a loved one. In this research grief refers to our emotional reactions to the deaths of those we care about.

Mourning

Mourning is the outward expression of grief.

Mental health

Trimbos (2022) describes mental health as the following: it includes how you relate to yourself and to others, as well as how you deal with the challenges you face every day. It also concerns how you and others experience this together.

Natural helpers

Members of a community to whom other network members naturally turn to for advice, support and other types of aid.

School environment

The research explicitly focuses on teenagers and school staff who are in secondary education.

Social network

The term social network refers to the web of social relationships that surround individuals and that may provide social support (Heaney & Israel, 2008).

Social support

Perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network.

Teenagers

In this research considered between the age of 14 and 18 years.

Peers

In this study, the grieving teenager’s classmates and friends are referred to as peers.

Perceived social support

Describes how people view their friends, family members, and other people available to provide material, psychological, and overall support when they are in need.

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1. Introduction

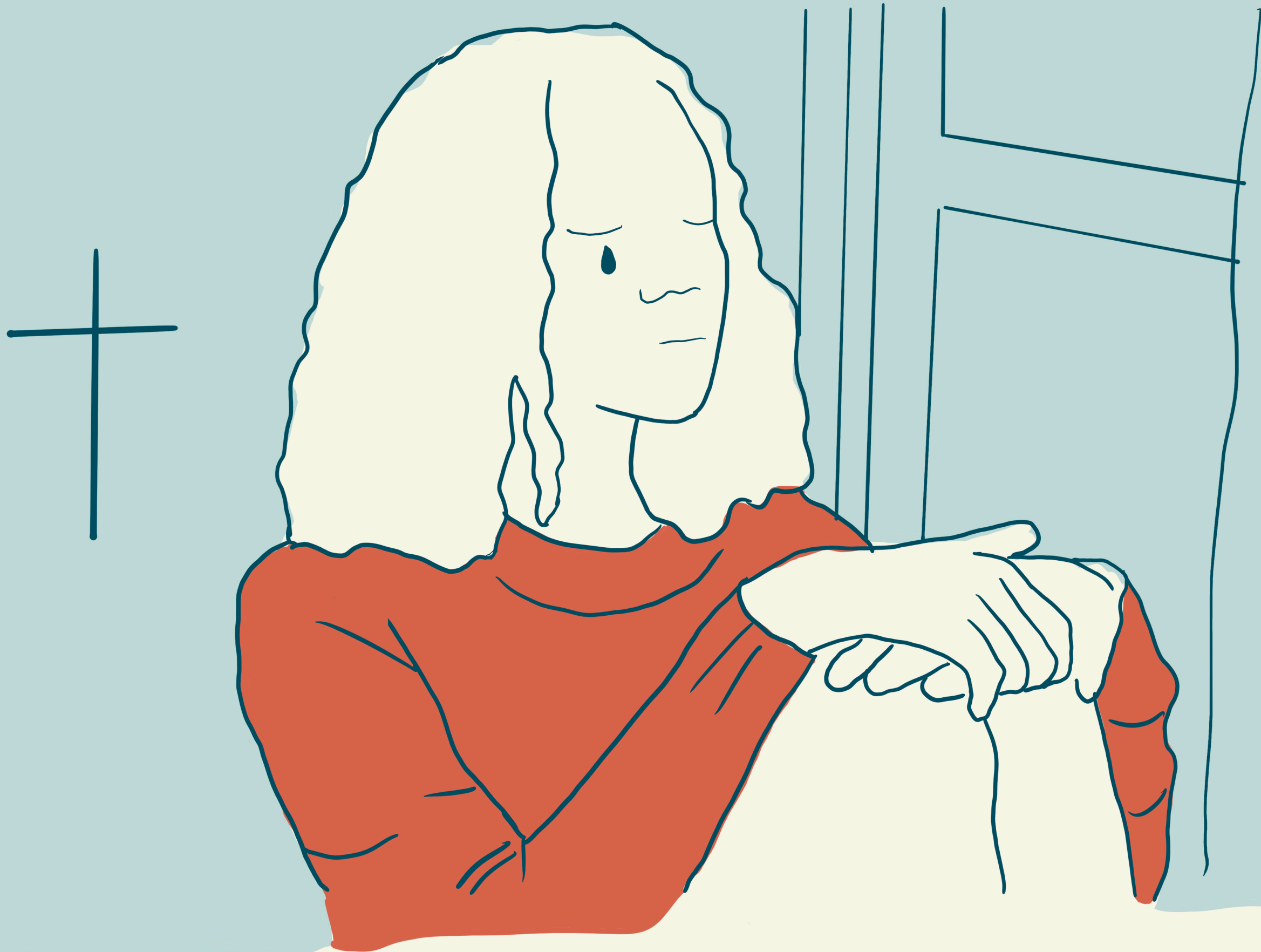
the project

This chapter introduces the topic of social support for teenagers with parental loss in secondary education. It illustrates the knowledge gap and the necessity for developing a design intervention for the school environment (1.1). Finally, it explains the research goal (1.2) and the approach for this project (1.3).

Chapter overview:

- 1.1 Mental health of teenagers
- 1.2 Project focus
- 1.3 Research approach

Laura is only 15 years old, and her dad has just passed away after an 8-month illness.



Today Laura will return to school for the first time since her father died.

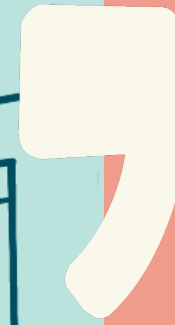


Laura's loss in the classroom environment...

I didn't know how to grieve and in my surroundings, there seemed to be no room for the sadness of losing my parent. I needed an understanding environment where my feelings could exist. Just an arm around me and the feeling of being supported.



Laura's peers...



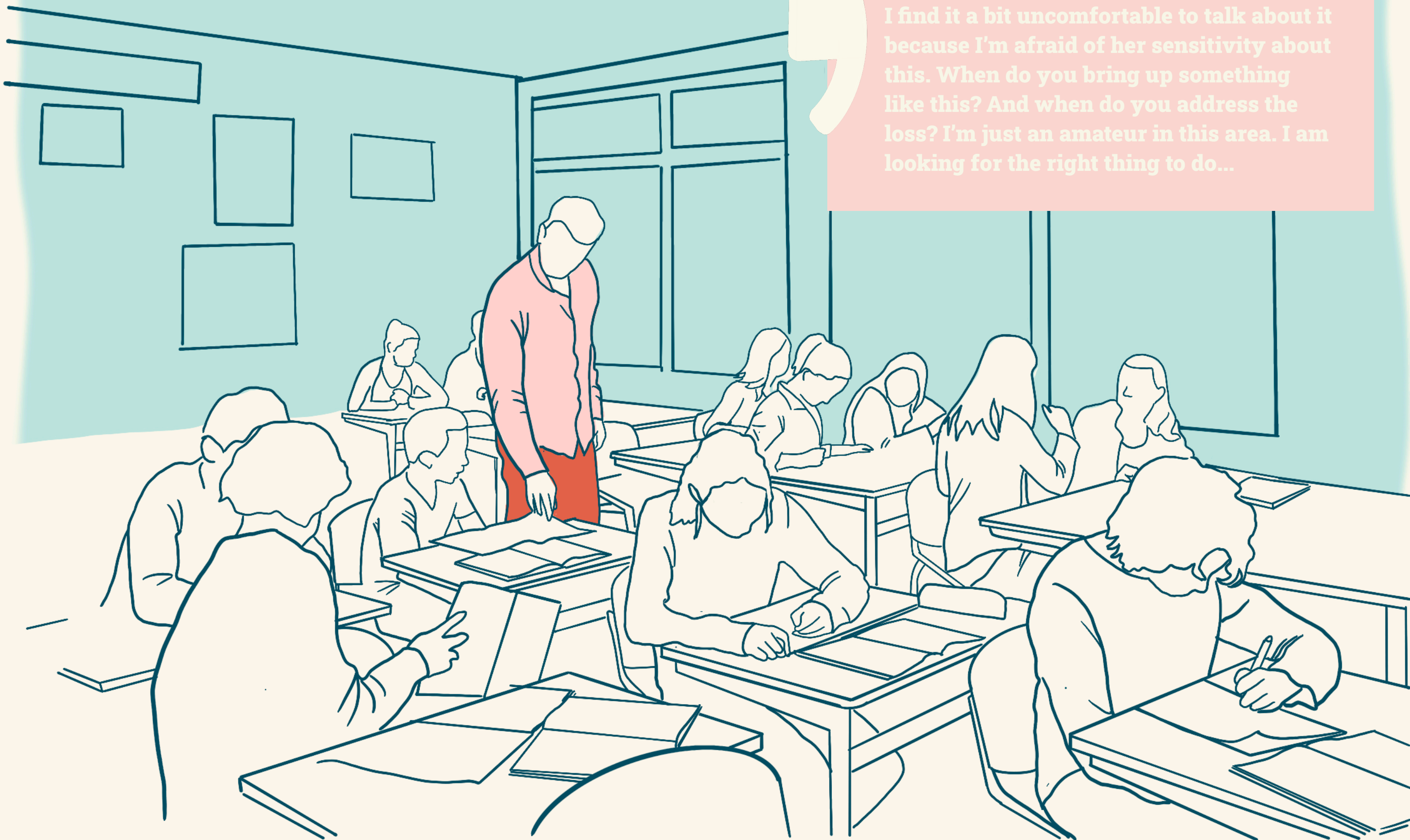
I have never experienced something like this before. What do you say or do to someone who has lost a parent? I am not sure...



Laura's teacher...

“

I find it a bit uncomfortable to talk about it because I'm afraid of her sensitivity about this. When do you bring up something like this? And when do you address the loss? I'm just an amateur in this area. I am looking for the right thing to do...



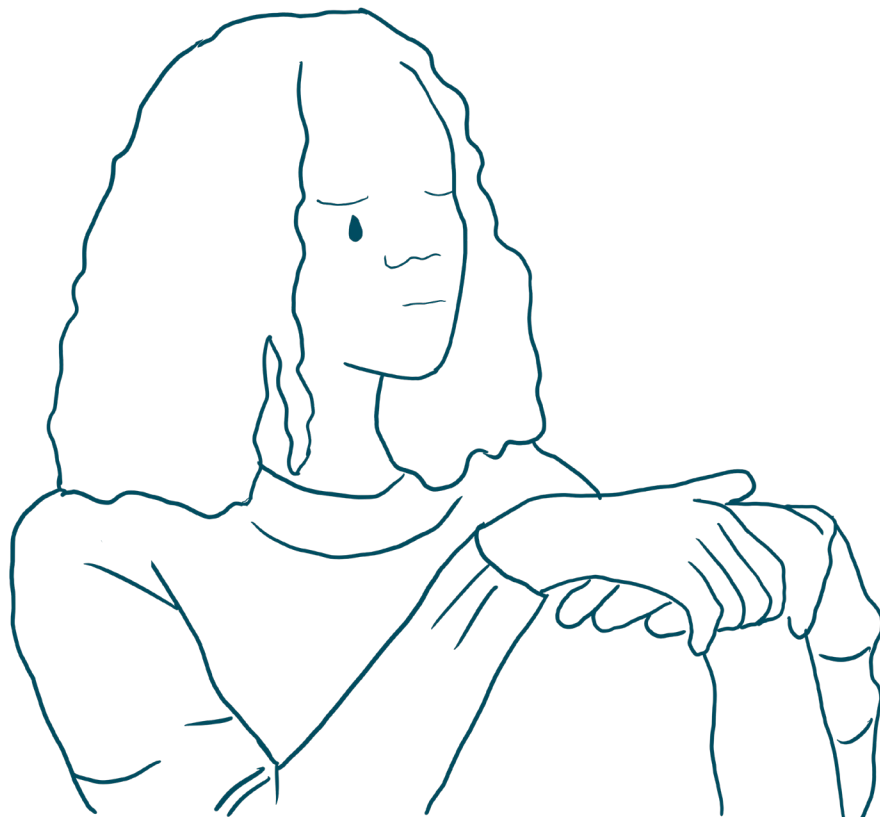
1.1

Bereaved teenagers in school environment

The introduction presents the story of Laura, who experienced the loss of her father at the age of 15. Her carefree perspective on life shifted after this event, as she came to realize that life was not as innocent as it seemed. Upon returning to school after her loss, she found that everything felt different. Despite the fact that grief was at the forefront of her mind, attention from people around her towards her loss quickly faded.

In this school environment, Laura's loss also had an impact on her relationships with her peers, teachers, and other school staff. This created a complex situation in which all parties involved were searching for the right way to handle it.

This thesis sheds light on and researches the experience of losing a parent as a teenager and returning to the school environment. The focus is on the need for social support and the perspectives of the bereaved teenager, peers, and school staff are taken into account.



The importance of researching and designing for bereaved teenagers in the school environment is further explained in this chapter:

Decreased mental health

Adolescence is a period of time that offers many possibilities, but also a vulnerable time of many weaknesses and risks. Physical, emotional and social changes, including exposure to poverty, abuse, or violence, can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems (WHO, 2021). Therefore it is an important period of life to invest in.

Taboo topic

Among teenagers with mental health problems, about 60% experiences it as a taboo topic to talk about (Kamphuis, 2019). Among teenagers the mindset exist: "floreren is de standaard".

More attention towards prevention

From international research it appears that 75% of the mental issues start before the age of 24 (Kessler RC, 2005). Having mental health issues at a young age often results in physical or mental issues at a later age. The adolescence

is a crucial phase in life for prevention of an unhealthy lifestyle and for the development of positive social relationships and a healthy mental wellbeing (Kessler RC, 2005).

Prevention at schools

Since teenagers spend a significant amount of time in school, this organisation can play an important role in the prevention of mental health issues. However, schools need more guidance regarding their part in this. It is intended to normalize the subject for conversation while also providing the school with resources to signal, prevent and approach mental health issues (VO Raad, 2022).

Compassionate school

Both teachers as well as students should be provided with sources to deal with the school environment challenges, such as mental health. There is a growing interest in the initiative of creating compassionate education, which provides teachers and students amongst others with emotional coping skills and promotes prosocial behaviour. This results in building a safe, collaborative,

encouraging and supporting learning environment (Greenberg & Turksma, 2015). Compassionate Schools includes educating teachers on how traumatic experiences, also known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), affect children's capacity to learn. A current challenge is understanding how compassion-focused programs in schools can facilitate compassion and improve prosocial attitudes and behaviour (Roeser, Colaianne, & Greenberg, 2018).

Grief

One of the most disruptive and potentially traumatic experience for a child is the death of a parent, sibling, or other important attachment figure (Griese, Burns, Farro, Silvern, & Talmi, 2017). The mental state is greatly impacted by grief. Teenagers go through bereavement and grief more strongly when it aligns with their growth as adolescents. It is important to boost factors to cope better with loss and grief. Research shows the importance of strong social networks for coping with bereavement (Çakar, 2020; Dopp & Clifford Cain, 2011).

Knowledge gap

Literature frequently discusses grief and bereavement, usually focused on either adults or children below the age of 12. However, the group of teenagers receive less attention in literature. Often the age between 12-18 years old is filed under the research on younger children and adults (Cinzia, Montagna, & Mastroianni, 2014). Since there are significant differences in children's development on many levels, including cognitive and emotional development, this research does not fully cover the more complex coping and grieving responses of teenagers. In addition, losing a parent around that age can result in considerable changes in the family structure, economic status, and changes to future plans.

The adolescence between 14-18 years old are not only underrepresented in research, but also in current design solutions that address grief and bereavement. For instance, the museum Tot Zover offers programs,



figure 1. Existing design interventions focusing on grief in the secondary school environment

like “dood gewoon in de klas”, to teach pupils in grades 7 and 8 about death. And multiple ‘rouwkoffers’ are addressed to younger ages (see figure 1).

Research focus

This project aims to explore the social support after parental loss in the secondary education, considering perspectives of the grieving teenagers, peers and teachers. By using a design approach, the topic of grief, social support and the needs and desires of multiple stakeholders are explored. This is used as basis to develop design opportunities to improve the grieving processes of teenagers, in order to maintain the needed social support after a loss.

This design study will contribute to the global initiative of compassionate education, by proposing and testing a design intervention for strengthening the social support within the secondary education.



Explore the social support after parental loss in the secondary education, considering perspectives of the grieving teenagers, peers and teachers.

1.2 Project focus

School environment

The social support provided in public high schools for teenagers who have experienced loss is the main topic of this study. For accessibility reasons, it was decided to concentrate on those who are between the ages of 14 and 18, and are in senior general secondary and pre-university education at a public high school (figure 2). The project's scope includes teenagers who have experienced a loss, next to the two social support groups: other students and teachers (figure 3). Although the social support extends beyond this, it is not included in this study in order to address this topic in the time frame of 100 days.

Scope of grief

A wide variety of loss experiences can result in the emotion of grief. For instance, after a divorce, being rejected by your football club, or receiving an

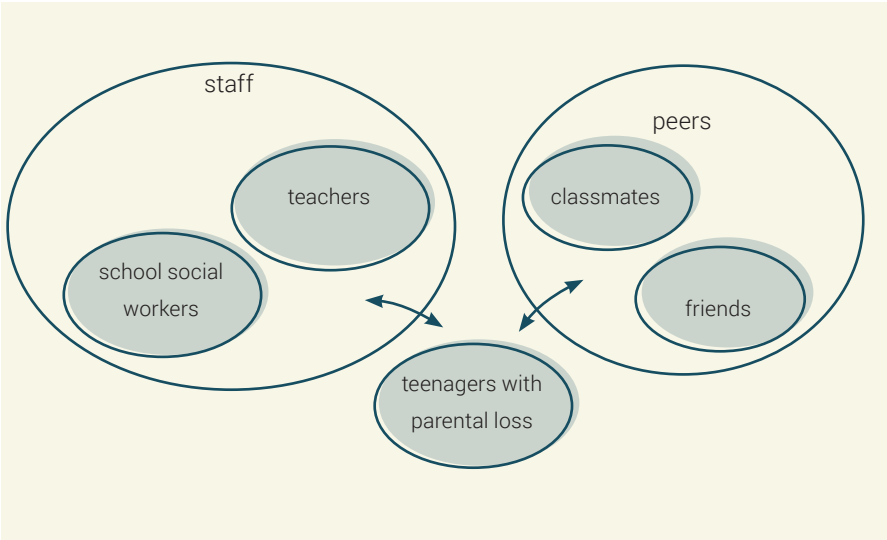


figure 3. Stakeholders in school environment

asthma diagnosis. Although these circumstances may lead to either brief or prolonged grief, the focus of this study is on mourning following the loss

of a loved one. The primary focus is the loss of a parent, since this generally has the most disruptive effect on teenagers lives .

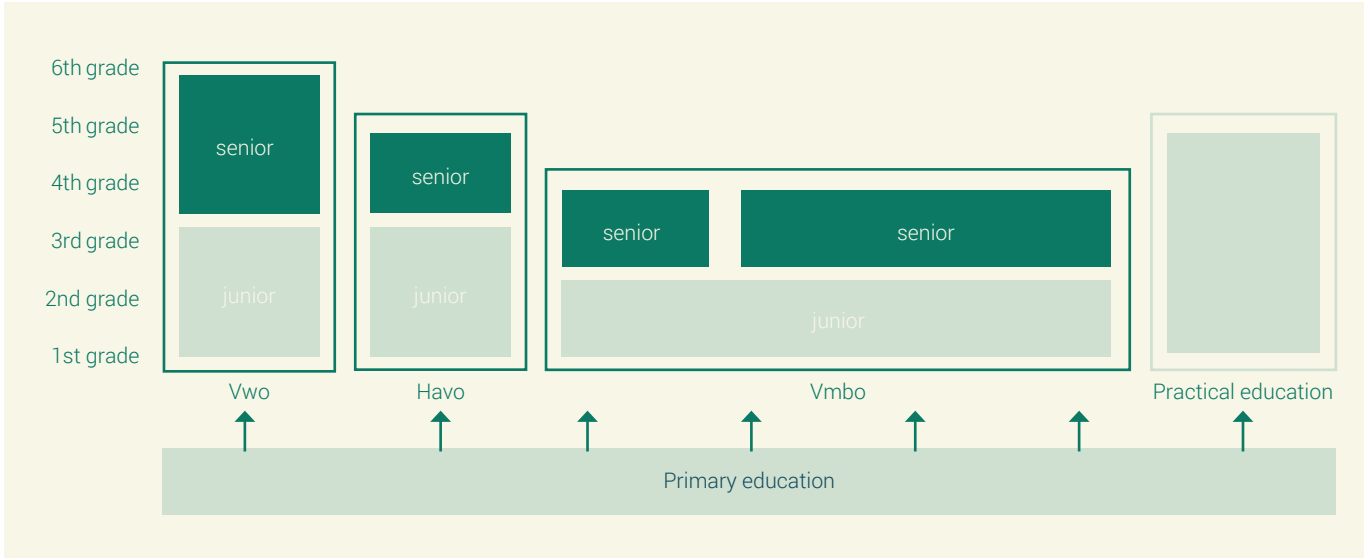


figure 2. Dutch school system

1.3 Research approach

Research phases

The process of the project can be best described by the double diamond method, in which multiple phases of diverging and converging are gone through.

The phases can be best described by the following stages:

1. Discover
2. Define
3. Develop
4. Deliver

The phases are explained in figure (figure 4).

Research and design questions

Several research and design activities were performed in order to answer the research questions (see figure 5). First literature research was undertaken to get an understanding of grief by teenagers and social support. Next semi-structured interviews were conducted to get deeper insights in grief and the school environment. After context mapping interviews* were performed to obtain experiences and needs of teenagers and teachers.

Co-creation** and co-reflection*** sessions with experts and stakeholders were held to get in depth input for the design. figure 6 and figure 7 show how the different activities are related to the research and design questions.

* Context mapping is a method to perform contextual research that involves users as the expert of their experiences (Sanders & Stappers, 2012). During the interviews generative tools were used to stimulate participants to express their experiences and needs.

**Co-creation is a creative process where experts and stakeholders are involved in creating new value (Veenhoff & Pater, 2021). It is a process where the designer involves stakeholders to think along about what the solution should include.

***Co-reflection where stakeholders and experts were involved in the design process to discuss the problem, the results of the research and evaluate early prototypes with their own experiences in mind (Tomico, Overbeeke, & Frens, 2009).

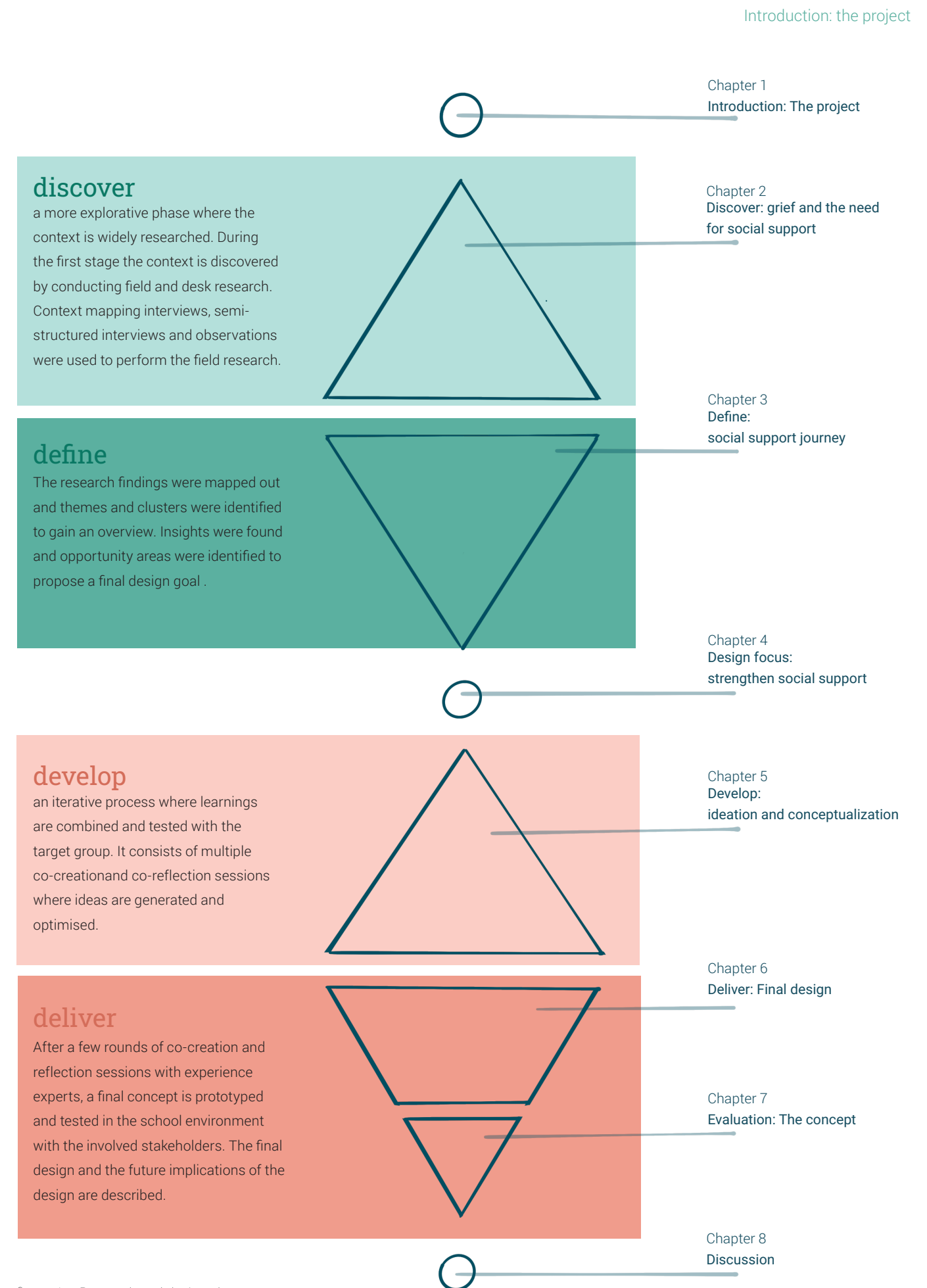

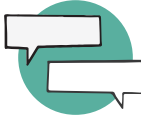








figure 4. Research and design phases

Research activity	Ref	Appendix
 Desk research on mental health, social support and grief. - Literature study - Podcast: Wat rouw je me nou?!	Lit Pod	
 Semi-structured interviews with experts. Different interviews with experts of multiple fields of expertise were conducted in order to gather expert opinions about the topic. - With 2 psychologists specialised in grief and loss and working with teenagers; - a psychologist working at the GGD - a pedagogue, - a school social worker; - three teachers.	SI1 SI2 SI3 SI4 SI5	
 Observations at a secondary school for a deeper contextual understanding.	Obs	
 Context mapping interviews with teenagers with a parental loss to get a deeper understanding of their personal experiences, needs and desires.	CM1	C
 Group interview with teenagers with a loss to get an understanding of their perspectives on the current state of social support provided at their schools.	GI1	
 Context mapping interviews with teachers to get a deeper understanding of their personal experiences, needs and desires of two teachers concerning the support of bereaved students.	CM2	D
 Questionnaire in order to get an understanding of the perception of teenagers on grief and supporting peers with a loss of a loved one, also referred to as 'beleefwereld onderzoek'.	Que	E
 Workshop day at Museum van de Geest discussing the topic of mental health in secondary education with teachers, followed with different workshops addressing how to improve mental health in the classroom.	WoD	F





Desing activity	Ref	Appendix
 Creative session with designers from the Technical University Delft to start generating ideas that address the design goal. And the coordinator Jongeren in Rouw at Humanitas.	CS1 CS2	
 Creative session with experience experts where was reflected on their personal experiences concerning receiving support at school following the loss of a loved one. That was the starting point of generating ideas.	CC1	G
 Co-reflection sessions with - three teenagers with perantal loss; - three teachers; - two experience experts - two school social workers. The ideas were proposed and the participants gave their feedback. After that, ideas where altered or new ideas were generated.	CR1 CR2 CR3 CR4	H
 Evaluation in context with experience experts, teachers, and experts from organisations concerning on mental health: - Coordinator Jongeren in Rouw at Humanitas - Coordinator VTO-vroeghulp at GGD - Bart of Rouwnetwerk Jong and experience expert - 3 teachers - 2 experience experts	EvI1 EvI2 EvI3 EvI4 EvI5	I

figure 5. Research and design activities

Research phase

grief

What is grief that follows after the loss of a loved one?

What are the psychological effects on teenagers of losing a parent?

How does bereavement for teenagers differ compared to younger children and adults?

social support

What is social support?

What is the effect
of social support on
bereavement?

What is the current social support system for teenagers with a loss?

secondary education

What factors affect how teenagers with parental loss perceive the support of their teachers and peers?

What are the experiences and needs of social support of bereaved teenagers within the school environment?

What are the experiences and needs of teachers concerning the support of a grieving student?

SI1

CM1

SI4

SI5

GI1

SI2

SI4

SI5

CM2

CM1

Lit

Que

Obs

SI3

SI1

GI1

WoD

H2.1

H2.3

H2.2

H2.4

H2.5

H3

figure 6. Research questions and research activities

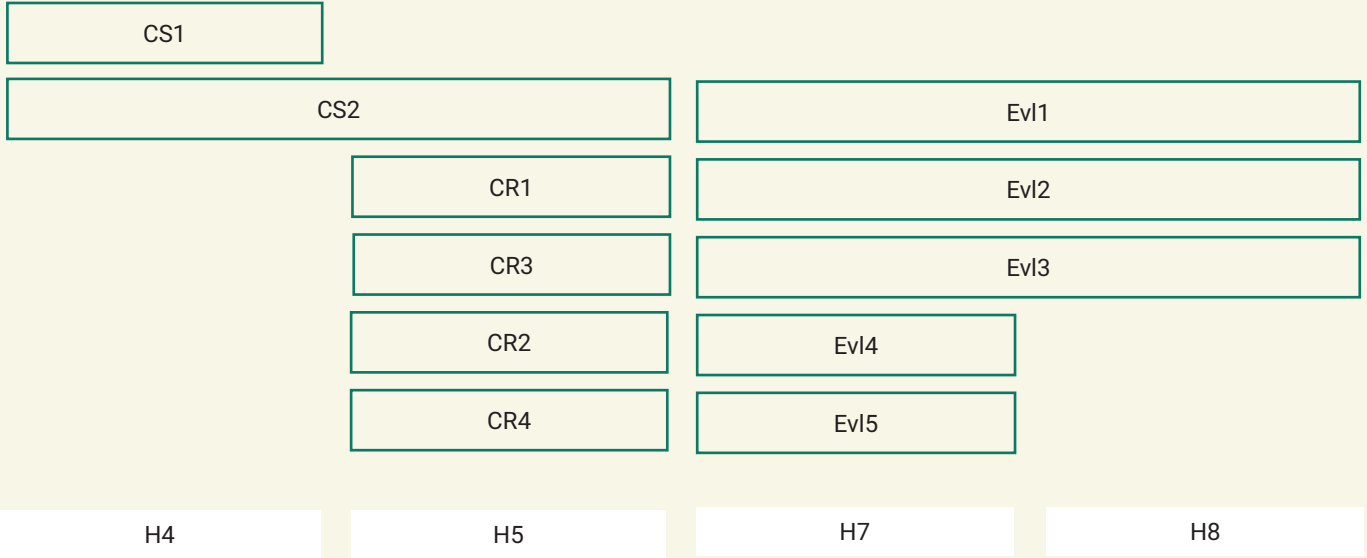
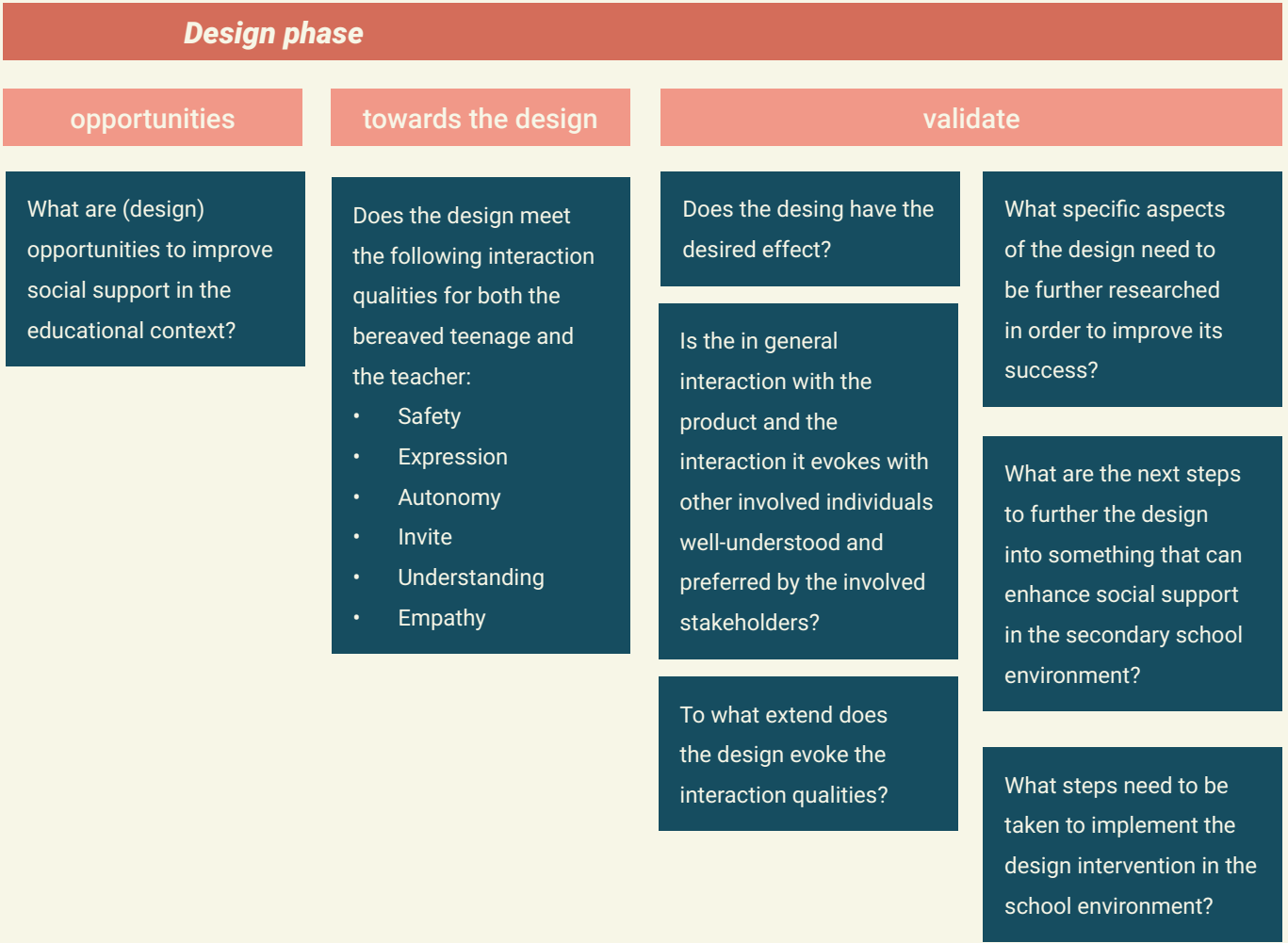


figure 7. Design questions and design activities



2. Discover

[grief and social support](#)

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a wide understanding of the topic from several fields of expertise. Both desk and field research is performed to achieve this. This chapter describes grief (2.1; 2.2) and social support (2.3) from a theoretic perspective. Next section (2.4) shows factors influencing the perceived support from bereaved teenagers within the school environment.

Chapter overview:

- 2.1 Grief
- 2.2 Grief by teenagers
- 2.3 Social support
- 2.4 The social networks of teenagers
- 2.5 Analysis of social support in school environment
- 2.6. Key insights

2.1

Grief

What is grief?

Grief is a response that can happen after the loss of someone with whom you had a meaningful relationship. Anticipated grief can exist before the death of a loved one. For example, this can happen when someone is diagnosed with a terminal medical condition. Grief is a personal experience. It can differ for each individual. Nederlands Jeugd Instituut (2015) describes the following reactions that may occur following the loss:

“Het rouwen is er altijd. Ik voel het ook in mijn hart en in mijn keel. Ik voel in mijn wangen tranen die eruit moeten.”

– CM1, teenager with parental loss

Physical: Tightness or heaviness in the chest or throat, dizziness, headaches, muscle weakness, fatigue, weight loss or gain, etc.

Emotional: Sadness, shock, yearning, denial, anger, helplessness, guilt, loneliness, pessimism, etc.

Cognitive: poor concentration, trigger disbelief, confusion, or hallucinations.

Behavioural: tenseness, reservedness, avoidance of persons and situations, etc.

Models about grief

Many research is on grief describing grief. Here some models will be highlighted.

Stages of grief

The five stages of grief, by Kübler Ross (1969), has been used for by guiding a grief process for a long time. The model exist of the following emotions experienced by people who are grieving, moving from stage 1 through stage 5:

1. denial;
2. anger;
3. depression;
4. bargaining;
5. acceptance.

Currently the model has been experienced as outdated. Other research showed there is another sequence of stages, or there is no clear process of different stages. For this research it is important to understand that each person will experience their grief in a different way, for a different amount of time, and in a different order.

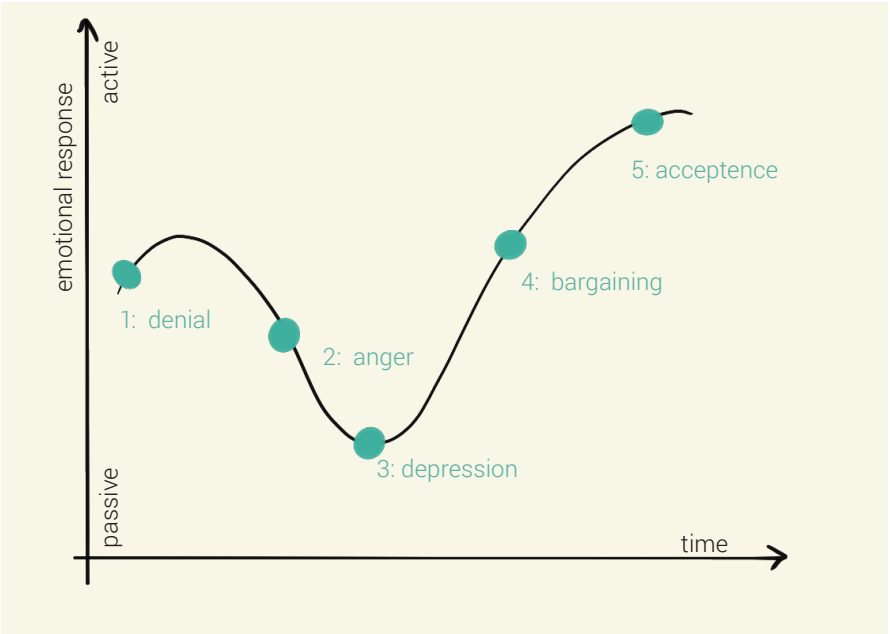


figure 8. Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle

Wordens tasks of mourning

Nowadays the ‘Tasks of mourning’ is often used. The American psychologist William Worden (2001) described grief as an active process, that can be divided in multiple tasks that have to be

embarking on a new life.

An individual can work on multiple tasks simultaneously, and tasks may be revisited and reworked over time. The tasks of mourning has been supplemented with task 0 by Fiddelaers-Jaspers.

This stresses the importance of dealing with losses form a young age. It is important to raise children with the idea that there is also space for sadness, and it there is no need for putting it aside (Weijers & Penning, 2001).

accomplished:

Task 0: Raise with life and death

Task 1: To accept the reality of loss

Task 2: To process the pain of grief

Task 3: To adjust to a world without the deceased

Task 4: To find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of

figure 9. Wordens tasks of mourning

Dual process model

The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (DPM), developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut (1999) describes two different orientations: loss oriented and restoration oriented. The main idea of the model is when there is balance between the two orientations. This model is shown during peer groups at Humanitas, to explain teenagers a more theoretical approach of grief.

“Het went nooit, maar wel steeds meer.”

– CM1, bereaved teenager

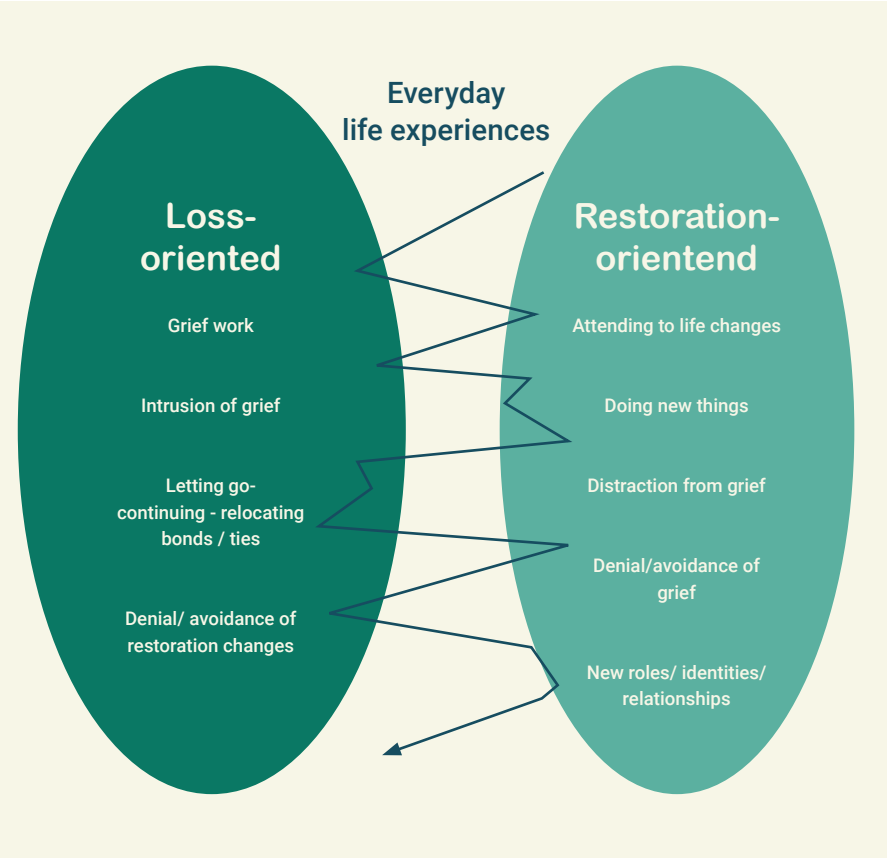


figure 10. Dual process model

Normal grief and complicated grief

The question of what defines “normal grief” cannot be simply answered. Each person experiences grief differently. When someone refers to complicated grief, they frequently mean an unresolved and traumatic bereavement. Significant impairment in work, health, and social functioning are frequently associated with it. The symptoms of a complicated grief seem

be familiar to depression. However, it distinguishes itself by the continuous focus on the deceased person. Also the symptoms of depression decrease over time, while the symptoms of complicated grief seem to stabilise from six months after the loss (Spuij, et al., 2012). Complicated grief occurs in about 10% of people with a loss (Zisook & Shear, 2009).

2.2
Grief by teenagers

Numbers

There is a reasonable chance a teenager has to face a loss of a loved one (parent, sibling, friend) during their high school period. Each year about 6000 children between 0-18 years old become (semi)orphaned. Of 50% of the cases this happens between the 12-18 years old. In total 2% of the teenagers are semi-orphaned (CBS, 2022).

Differences with younger ages and adults

When bereavement and grief aligns with adolescent development, teenagers generally experience it more intensely compared to younger ages. Since adolescence in particular is a period of transition from biological, psychological, and social perspectives (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). The transitions include the development of their identity, their self-image and taking distance towards their parents.

In contrast with younger ages, teenagers are fully aware of the consequences of the death of a loved one, just like adults. During this period teenagers are trying to make sense of their existence on earth. The death raises more questions of meaning. They lack experience with dealing with a loss teenagers feel unprepared and confused by the jumbled emotions (Nederlands Jeugd Instituut, 2015).

“Soms weet ik niet welke gevoelens horen bij rouw en welke bij de pubertijd.”

– CM1, teenager with parental loss

2.3 Social support

Negative consequences on mental health

Research performed at two secondary schools (1746 participants, between 11 and 16 years) in Northern England showed that loss of a parent or close friend was associated with depressive symptoms. The effect of losing a loved one was greatly influenced by how the young person felt the loss has affected their lives. The majority of teenagers who had experienced significant loss did not feel the need for professional help. The support in their surroundings helps them to get through. Those who did want to discuss their grieving experiences may frequently do so with relatives and friends (Harrison & Harrington, 2001).

Literature shows many potentially negative consequences of a parent death, as an increased likelihood of psychopathology later in life. Parental and peer loss is associated with negative mental health outcomes (Johnson, Torres , Sykes, Gibson, & Baker, 2017). Children who experienced

parental loss before the age 18 are more likely to develop depression in later life (Claudine, Zhang, & Wang, 2020). Also bereaved youth have around 2.4 higher risk regarding alcohol and substance abuse compared to nonbereaved counterparts (Hamdan, Melhem, Porta, Song, & Brent, 2014).

Importance of social support

Considering the negative effects on mental well-being, it is crucial to boost factors to cope better with loss and grief. Social support is inherent to the adaptation to bereavement, and thereby crucial to maintain healthy wellbeing levels (Çakar, 2020). The social support may include family, friends, peers, teachers, support groups, religious/spiritual resources, etc. A lack of social support is an important risk factor for the well-being. Which can result in a complicated grief.

The theory and analysis of support in the environment of secondary education is further described in the next paragraph.

Theoretical side

The significance of social support was emphasized in the previous chapter. The theory of social support is discussed in this chapter. Followed by an analysis of teenagers' social support groups in the school environment.

Types of social support

House (1981) defines social support as:

“perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network.”

The social support can be divided into four domains:



Perceived social support

Perceived social support refers to the extend individuals believe friends, family members, friends, teachers, classmates and other sources in their environment can provide support in times of need. It includes to the expectation that support will be provided, rather than actual instances in which one has received support.

In de pedagogiek daarentegen is ‘er zijn’ belangrijker dan ‘iets doen’. Het gaat erom dat tieners door en in jouw aanwezigheid kunnen groeien, dat docenten elke leerling echt zien en weten wat werkt bij wie.”

- De angstpodcast, Bert Wienen (2022)

figure 11. Types of support

2.4

The social networks of teenagers

Importance of social support in the school environment

Considering the social support, schools are interesting organisations. Teenagers spend a large amount of time there, where they also develop their social and cognitive skills in company of their teachers and classmates. In general, during the adolescence the support of the parents decrease, since they will turn more towards their peers. Also teenagers value the teachers' informational support highly, especially since the capability of parents to support decreases around this age. As a result, the school has the opportunity to play an important role in social support for the teenagers.

Peer support

The relationship between teenagers and peers is informal and are equal, without any determined hierarchy. During the adolescence there is an increase in support from friends and classmates compared to the support by their parents (Scholte & Aken, 2006). Since teenagers spend a lot of time at

school, the network of close friends are likely to be formed by their classmates. In general, secondary education students generally identified peers as the preferred source of support (Carter & Janzen, 1994).

Bad news about the health of a parent, or the death of parent can put pressure on existing relations between peers and the teenager with a loss. Friends might get into more supportive position than they had ever before in their lives.

It can result in a detachment between peers and the bereaved teenager. It has been found that grieving teenagers believe their peers are less able to support them in death-related situations than in ones concerning relationships or school (Carter & Janzen, 1994). On the other hand, the death can also strengthen the bond and result in a more intimate relationship. Parentally bereaved teenagers usually considered the peers as a source of emotional and instrumental support (Gray, 2008).

Teacher support

Teachers are trained to educate students and maintain healthy classroom atmosphere. The focus is mainly on teaching their subject in a group setting. The individual interactions are mainly with the mentor of the teenagers.

Teachers generally offer the lowest level of support compared to classmates and parents. In relation to the type of support, informational support is the most significant provided by teachers, both in terms of frequency and satisfaction. In general, students believe that teachers provide them with information on dealing with questions, problems and everyday tasks (Hombrados-Mendieta & Jacinto, 2012).

After the parental death, the support required from teachers can change. Between some teachers and teenagers a more informal relationship can arise after the loss of a parent, where the emotional support increas-es. However, this is not the case for many teenagers.

Family

Friends

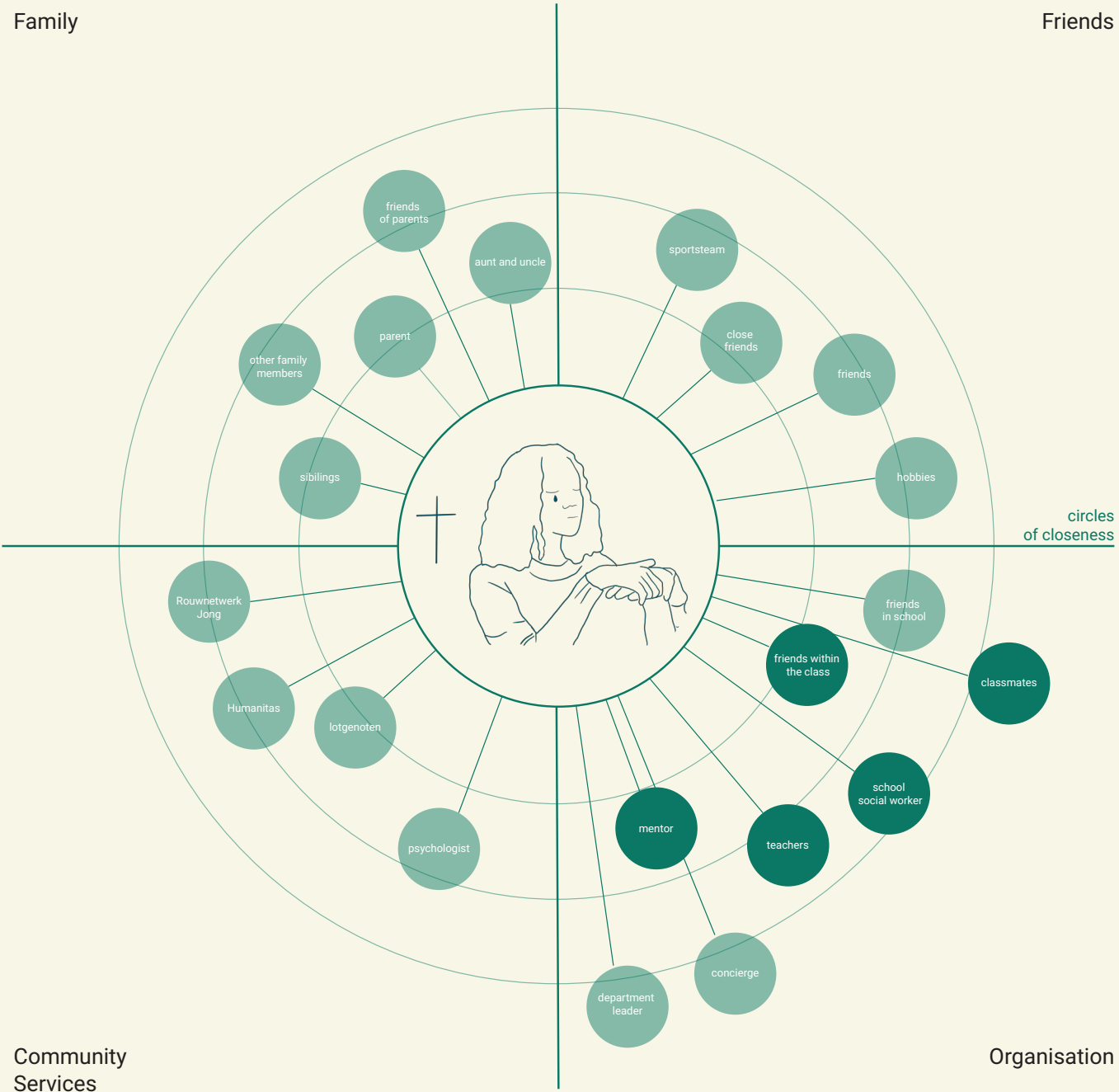


figure 12. Social support network of teenagers

2.5

Analysis of social support in school environment

Method

The framework presented in this study is based on a combination of research methods including desk research (Lit; Pod, 2022), semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and experts (SI1; SI2; SI3; SI4; SI5, 2022), 'beleefwereldonderzoek' with teenagers (Que, 2022), context mapping interviews with teenagers with parental loss and teachers (CM1; CM2, 2022), group interviews with teenagers with parental loss, and a workshop day for teachers focusing on mental health in the classroom (WoD, 2023). During the analysis, the fundamental needs by Desmet and Fokkinga (2020) were used as a input to analyse the data, and these are incorporated into the results. The data collected from these methods was analysed by identifying common themes and clustering them into categories. Detailed descriptions of the research activities and analysis can be found in appendix C, D, E and F.

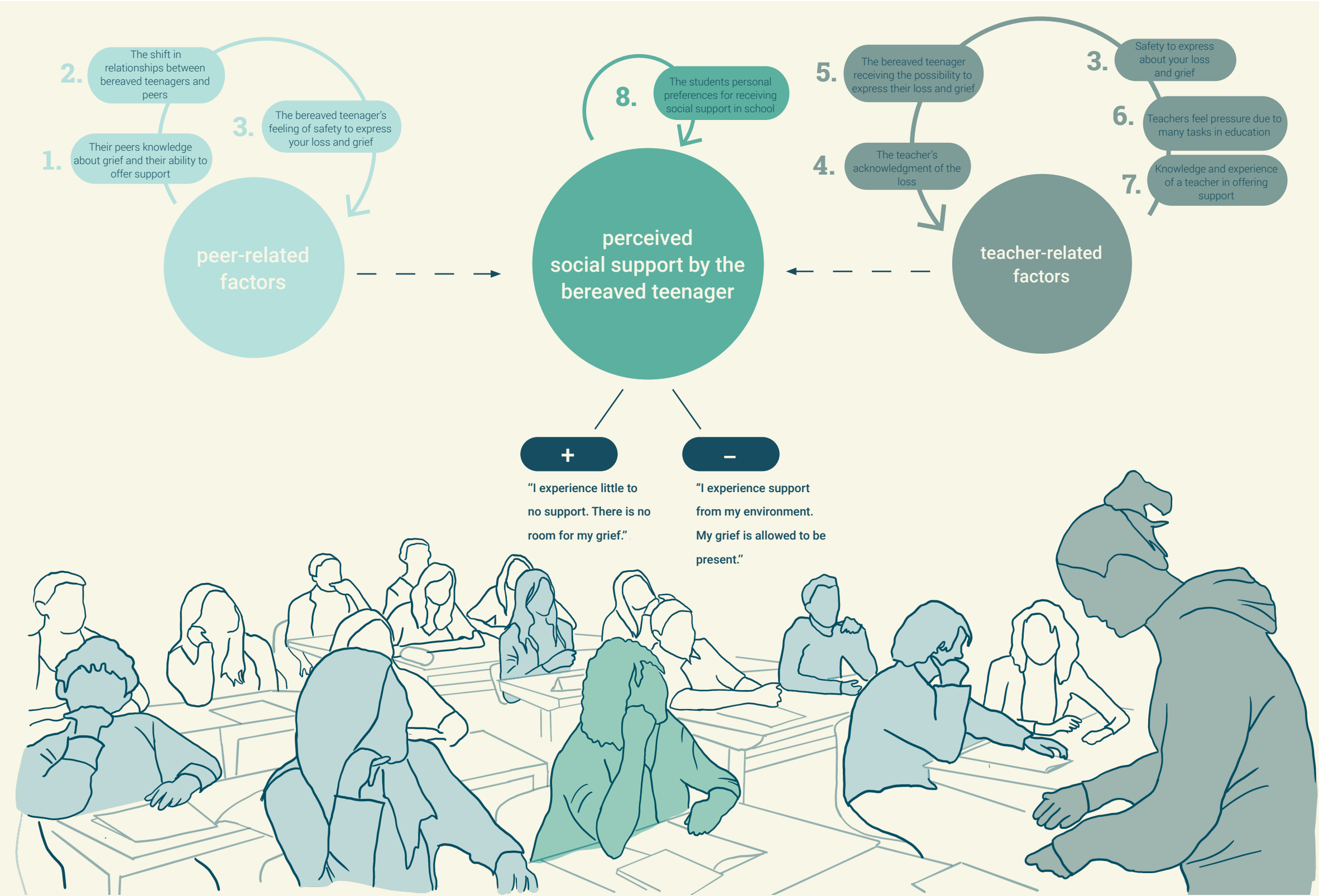
Explanation of framework

Within the clusters, many were dedicated to factors influencing the perceived social support. The framework was developed to gain a better understanding of the factors that shape the perception of social support among bereaved teenagers. The results revealed the complexity of the support system in secondary education, highlighting eight factors that play a crucial role in influencing the perception of social support among bereaved teenagers. Each of these factors is described in detail in the following paragraphs.

This study places a particular focus on the three primary stakeholders within the school environment: teenagers with parental loss, peers and teachers. These factors are analysed from multiple perspectives, including those of the bereaved teenager, teacher, and peers.

It is important to note that the factors experienced together can either positively or negatively impact the perceived social support from either peers or teachers.

figure 13. Overview of factors influencing the perceived social support in the school environment



Rich perception of grief and support of teenagers

Teenagers do have a certain perception of what grief is and what kind of social support they can offer. To get an understanding teenagers’ perception on grief and offering support a short questionnaire is conducted with 75 teenagers (see appendix E). Grief was mainly described with words like “sadness”, “pain” and “emptiness” (see figure 14). Also many described it as a “process” that happens after a loss.

“Het verdriet dat ontstaat als iets waar je van houdt uit je leven verdwijnt”

– Quest, Teenager (15y)

“ Een sterke hersenschudding gepaard met het gevoel van schuld en spijt.”

– Quest, Teenager (16y)

“ Een proces om te beseffen en emoties te uiten bij de dood van iemand. Het kan langdurig duren of niet, ligt aan de persoon. ”

–Quest, Teenager (17y)

1. Their peers knowledge about grief and their ability to offer support

Teenagers have a thorough understanding of grief and on providing support, but they don’t always act on that knowledge due to their lack of experience with sensitive topics. The attention given to teenagers after the loss of a loved one is often focused on the short time after the loss and may not continue over time. This lack of ongoing attention may not align with the desired support of the bereaved teenager.

Factor related to peers

Also was asked to describe the support they would offer to a classmate that loses its parent. It was described by “talk about it”, “ask what they need” and “physical support”. They often indicated that they would give support if they were friends with the bereaved classmate, otherwise they felt it was not their job. On the other hand, some indicated “to offer the bereaved teenager space” and others “not to know what to do”.

“Vragen hoe het gaat. Over praten.

Knuffel geven maar niet constant over hebben en afleiding.”

– Quest, teenager (17y)

“Ligt eraan hoe goed ik diegene ken. Bij een vriend een knuffel of klop op zijn schouder.”

- Quest, teenager (17y)

“Niet constant te laten herinneren aan diegene. Die klasgenoot zoveel mogelijk opvrolijken.”

– Quest, teenager (16y)

Teenagers lack in experience to talk about vulnerable topics

For many teenagers it is the first time facing a friend of a peer with a loss of a loved one. At home and at school are places to normalise the topic of death and grief. However, at home the topic is not always spoken about. Peers can experience discomfort and act awkward or even avoid the bereaved teenager.

“Je merkt toch een ongemakkelijke vibe bij leeftijdsgenoten als dit onderwerp naar voren komt.”

– CM1, 15 Y

The level of attention given to the loss may not always align with the level desired support

The first weeks after the loss, the intensity of attention towards the survivors is high. Teachers and sometimes peers attend the funerals. In some cases a moment in class is dedicated to the loss.

After a certain time the attention slowly fades away. The bereaved teenager receives fewer questions. The name of the loved one is less mentioned. The teenager does not always introduce the topic themselves, because they feel it is not the right time or might feel ashamed. However, not talking about their loved one often doesn't feel right. The lack of attention makes them feel like their loss is not being recognized. This is experienced as painful.

“Het werd wel minder. De eerste weken vraagt iedereen: hoe gaat het met je. Voor mij speelt het nu nog steeds elke dag. Ik kan er nu nog elke dag aan denken en ook om huilen als ik wil. Voor je omgeving verwatert dat wel snel”.

– CM1, 25 Y

figure 14. The perception of supporting peers after parental death within the 15-18 year old age

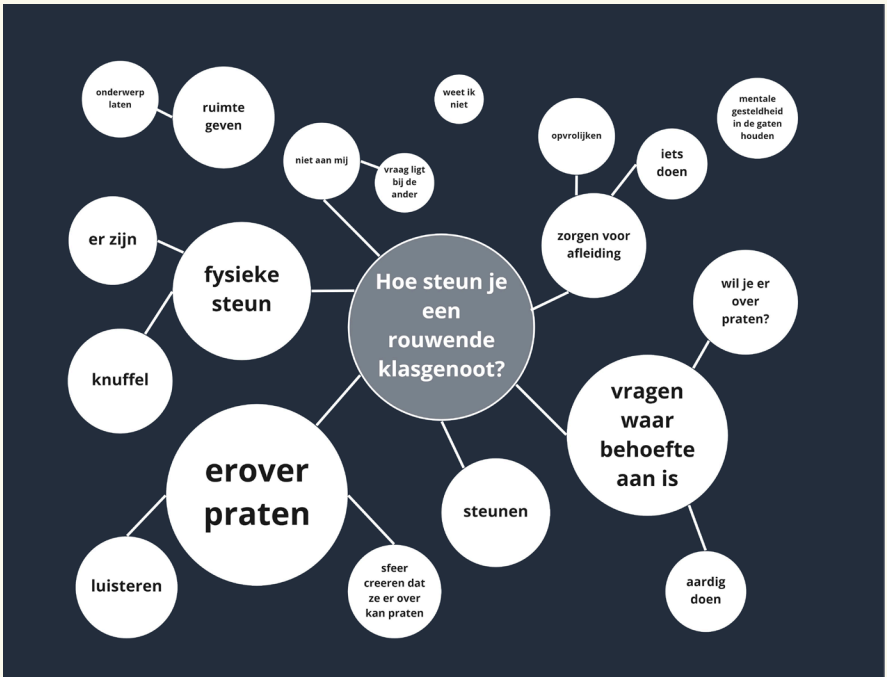
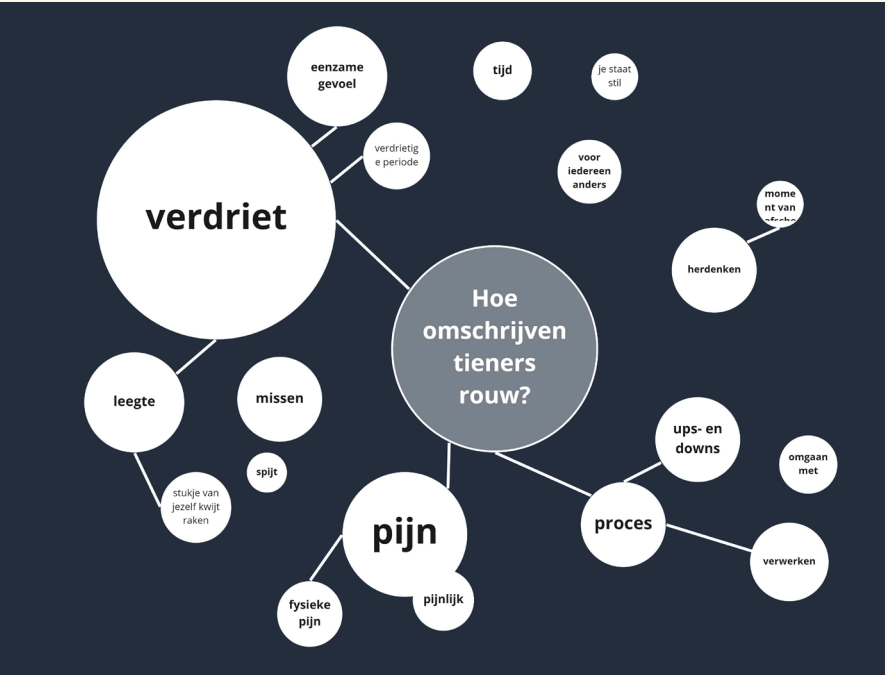


figure 15. the perception of grief within the 15-18 year old age



2.

The shift in relationships between bereaved teenagers and peers

The death of a parent is a moment of growing up for teenagers, causing them to lose their innocence. Bereaved teenagers may struggle to relate to their peers and feel isolated in their grief. This feeling contradicts the desire of not wanting to be perceived differently.

Factor related to peers

“Je wordt op de leeftijd ook in een volwassen fase gegooid. Je gaat van een kinderlijke bewustzijn naar iets wat je pas op latere leeftijd zou moeten leren. Je wordt een paar jaar ouder, en dan is het lastig je te relateren aan klasgenoten en vriendjes en vriendinnen.”

- M. ervaringsdeskundige, 20 jaar

Life loses it innocence

Teenagers describe the illness of one of their parents, and in general the death of a parent as a moment of growing up. It excludes the unconcerned lifestyle that they had before. It is often a moment teens experience feelings and thoughts that they never had before. From that moment on life has lost its innocence. Some teenagers may feel excessively responsible for the functioning of the family as a whole. This phenomenon is called parentification. Some teenagers remain silent so that the family won't go through any more suffering (Spuij, 2017). Often bereaved teenagers feel like their puberty has been skipped (CM1, 2022). While other teenagers are exploring life and are discovering the boundaries, teenagers who have lost a parent do not always feel the need.

“Als je jong bent weet je soms niet of gevoelens komen van rouw komen, of dat het komt omdat je jong bent. bijvoorbeeld mijn studie keuze. Bij RNJ werd dat mij wel duidelijk.”

CM1, bereaved teenager

“Of mensen vroegen: waar ga je heen. Dan moest ik uitleggen dat ik een herdenkingsdag van mijn vader had. Dat is zo iets groots voor mij. Maar voor anderen mensen stellen zich dat niet zo heel groot voor.”

CM1, bereaved teenager

“Je bent met hele andere dingen bezig dan mensen die zich sociaal aan het ontdekken zijn. Soms denk je waar maak je je druk om?”

Podcast ‘Wat rouw je me nou?!’

Hard to relate to peers after losing a parent

As one of the teenagers stated during the podcast ‘Wat rouw je met nou?!’:

“Er is geen ruimte voor rouw in de wereld van mensen zonder rouw.”

This statement covers the experience of many teenagers with a loss (CM1, 2022). These teenagers describe that peers can never understand what they go through. They feel isolated in their feelings of grief, around teenagers that live in a world that is so different from theirs.

For bereaved teenagers the feelings of grief are intertwined with the feelings the come along with the transitions of their puberty. Teenagers indicate it hard to relate feelings to their loss or their puberty.

Peer groups with likeminded experiences can help to meet these desire of recognition and offers a community feeling. Many participants described positive experiences with peer groups they participated in. The positive effects are also acknowledged by the experts and literature (SI1; SI2; (Fiddelaers-Jaspers, 2008)).

New encounters

Environments change quickly for teenagers. Changing classes, moving to a new city, going from primary to secondary education are a few examples. Every new situation leads to new encounters with those who are unaware of the loss. It raises questions by bereaved teenagers, like: when should I introduce this subject? And whom am I supposed to tell about this?

“In de groep is het fijn dat je weet dat iedereen iets soortgelijks heeft gehad. Het is niet precies hetzelfde maar wel soort gelijk.”

CM1, bereaved teenager (14y)

“Ik had toen een meisje in de klas, en haar moeder was al overleden. Dat zorgde ook wel voor erkenning. Dat was ergens ook wel heel prettig moet ik zeggen.”

CM1, experience expert (25y)

“Aan iedereen die je beter leert kennen moet je het vertellen. Mensen die dicht bij je staan horen het te weten. Maar wanneer vertel je zoiets dan?”

CM1, bereaved teenager (16y)



Teachers showing their soft side

Teachers indicate that they are more approached because they show their vulnerable side in front of the class or individually with the students (CM1; CM2, 2022). For example, by sharing a personal story. It takes a time to create a relationship of trust between the teacher and the students, sharing a personal story seems to strengthen this.

Sometimes, the mentor -who is frequently thought of as the dedicated person to approach when students are not doing well- doesn't fit the bereaved teenager. It is important that there is a good fit between the bereaved teenager, teacher and the type of support provided. Having a teacher with whom you are feel comfortable with is crucial. A good fit is important for the effect of the social support (Dopp & Clifford Cain, 2011).

“Ik heb zelf een crash gehad toen ik 23 was. Vanuit daar heb ik een verhaal ontwikkeld dat gaat over emotionele buffering. Dit verhaal vertel ik aan alle klassen. Dat maakt wel dat ik wordt benaderd door leerlingen. Met dit soort dingen [over verlies].”

CM2, Teacher

Autonomy in sharing what, when and with who

During interviews (CM1; G11; SI4, 2022) came forward that sharing about your loss is something that can only happen in safe settings. Teenagers who have experienced a loss should feel safe to talk about it since it reveals a vulnerable side of them. This includes they have to autonomy to decide when, what and with who they share about their loss. The environment should avoid putting pressure on the teenager to talk about it.

Important is the individual with whom the sharing occurs. For example, sharing about your loss with a mentor is not always preferred. The teenager should feel the connection with the teacher in order to open up.

Next, the environment in the classroom needs to feel safe so that students may share bad news about their parents' health or their parents' deaths. Sharing about the loss is experienced as vulnerable, and bereaved teenagers are afraid to cry in class. Many teenagers don't want to share with their classmates, but prefer only to do so with friends. In some cases teenagers do want to share within the group, and experience sharing with the class as a relieve.

“Als je zoiets verteld wil je het niet even benoemen. Je zegt niet: ‘trouwens mijn vader is overleden...’ Dan zou het niet de juiste aandacht krijgen. Het heeft zo geen impact op iemand anders leven, al helemaal niet als je diegene niet kent. Dan vind ik het bijna zonde, als ik het zo even noem.”

CM1, bereaved teenager

‘Ik heb het aan de klas verteld. Ik vond het spannend want was bang dat het iets zou veranderen. Maar het voelde goed als zij het weten.’

CM1, bereaved teenager

Atmosphere in the staffroom

Not only a safe classroom is needed, also a safe staffroom. In the interviews with different teachers (CM2, 2022) came forward how the atmosphere between teachers is reflected in the classroom. Some teachers even mentioned topics as death and grief as a taboo in their teacher room. If such topics are not even mentioned in the teacher's room, breaking taboos concerning mental health, and specifically grieving, cannot happen in classrooms.

The examples underneath illustrate two different scenarios of a loss within the school community, and how this was experienced by teachers. It stresses the point that a community feeling within the school has a significant impact on how loss and grief can be experienced.

1/ “Een leerling ligt momenteel in coma. Ik had van de week een ervaring dat in de docentenkamer een leraar in huilen uitbarst. Docent zegt snikkend alleen de naam en loopt weg. En verder wordt er niet gesproken, over wat het verlies binnen de docenten teweeg brengt.”

CM2, Teacher

2/ Wat wij als school hebben meegemaakt. Dat is iets heel bijzonders geweest. Soms komt dat weer boven bij mij en collega's. We hebben een fantastische conciërge. Hun dochter kreeg toen ze net klaar was met school leukemie, en is overleden. De hele school heeft meegerouwd. De begrafenis was in de grote kerk. Leerlingen, ouders, docenten, iedereen was daar bij aanwezig. Als ik daar nog aan denk lopen de rillingen me over de rug.”

CM2, Teacher

3. The bereaved teenager's feeling of safety to express your loss and grief

Grieving teenagers require a safe environment to express their emotions, which can feel vulnerable in educational settings. The research identified factors that either strengthen or weaken this sense of safety. Factors that were found to enhance this feeling of safety included teachers showing their vulnerable side, giving students autonomy in sharing, and a supportive teacher room atmosphere that influences the broader school environment.

Factor related to peers and teachers



4.

The teacher's acknowledgment of the loss

Teenagers who have experienced loss and grief require understanding and support from their teachers and school staff. Follow-ups after sharing about their experiences are important. It is important for teachers to strike a balance between treating bereaved teenagers normally and acknowledging their loss.

Factor related to teachers

Teenagers need understanding from staff

The mentor is often informed about the bad health situation of a teenagers' parent or the students' loss. Transmission from a mentor to the staff about your loss experience is often preferred by teenagers with a loss (CM2, 2020). Teenagers want an understanding from teachers about the situation at home and the effect it can have on their schoolwork. They don't want to tell all the teachers themselves, but they want a feeling of acknowledgment about their loss in a thoughtful and sensitive way.

"Meestal wat ze zeggen is: je mag het vertellen aan alle collega's. Ze willen dat we het weten en dat er begrip is, waar bijvoorbeeld een toets niet af is."

CM2, teacher

Follow-ups after sharing about the loss and grief

Follow-ups are import after a teenager shared about their parental loss or the illness of a parent. Expressing yourself with a teacher is vulnerable. Teenagers with a loss indicate that the interactions after sharing their struggles are important. No follow-ups after sharing your story is experienced as painful (CM1, 2022). A follow-up is appreciated, especially after some time has passed and the support of other relations has decreased.

"Mijn mentor die een lul is overigens. Toen ik vertelde wat er speelde, vertelde hij dat hij exact hetzelfde had meegemaakt. Maar daarna heeft hij mij nooit meer aangesproken. Dat heb ik heel vervelend gevonden."

CM1, experience expert (25y)

Treated normally but acknowledge the loss

The bereaved teenagers want to be treated similarly to peers. Not too gently and too much attention after the loss. Also they indicate to desire recognition from teachers and not ignoring or avoiding the fact of the loss. Keeping silent about the loss is experienced as painful. Over acknowledgment is experienced as not appropriate and makes them feel different. For a teacher finding the right balance between acknowledging the loss and still treating the teenager the same as other students is important.

Teenagers are, more than adults, inclined to avoid and deny grief (Spuij en Boelen, 2009). They often reject support. Nevertheless, it is very important for teenagers that school shows empathy; they are very disappointed when the school does not (Fiddelaers-Jaspers, 2004).



5.

The bereaved teenager receiving the possibility to express their loss and grief

Teachers can create a supportive environment by showing interest in the well-being of bereaved teenagers and offering opportunities for expression that fit their needs. Grieving teenagers may struggle to express themselves effectively due to varied and complex emotions associated with their grief and puberty.

Factor related to teachers

Teacher showing interest in how you are doing

The student wants to be seen. As a teacher you can be inviting. The feeling of safety and someone you can depend on. Questions from teachers like ‘how are you doing?’ are not always answered directly by students, but are lowering the threshold to return later to this teacher (CM2, 2022).

Offer ways of expression that fits the teenager

After the parental loss the individuals may experience significant emotional upheaval related to both their grief and puberty. However, due to the complex and varied emotions associated with these experiences, teenagers may express themselves differently from one moment to the next. Some may initially reject support but later require it, while others may struggle to articulate their emotions effectively.

“Ik maakte echt afspraken met ze. Vaste momenten afspraken om met ze te gaan zitten. Als ik dat niet doe, verlies je contact en grip.”

– CM2, teacher

“Bij handvaardigheid maken ze een tijdlijn. Ze kiezen het belangrijkste moment, en dat moment gaan ze verbeelden. Sommige leerlingen kiezen om hun verlies te verbeelden.”

– CM2, teacher

They are not always able to express themselves in a mature way seen to their transition in emotional social development (Nederlands Jeugd Instituut, 2015). However, a teenager's cognitive abilities can have a significant impact on their ability to cope with challenges as grief (Stokes, 2009). This includes to what extend the teenagers can express their story, feelings and share memories.

According to the teachers (CM2, 2022), students sometimes shared their struggles and experiences during various assignments in different lessons. These assignments provided an opportunity for students to express themselves, and often resulted in the revelation of new information that the teachers were previously unaware of.

‘Vanuit de tijdlijn (geschiedenis) heb ik ook wel eens tegen de mentor gezegd: dit en dit speelt bij een leerling. Zo een simpele opdracht is al een aanleiding om te vertellen wat er aan de hand is.

– CM2, teacher



6. Teachers feel pressure due to tasks in education

Teachers have limited time to offer support to bereaved students due to busy schedules and additional tasks. Additionally, the lack of exchange between teachers results in a restriction in the improvement of education, particularly in the area of offering support to teenagers.

Factor related to teachers

Lack of time to offer support because of additional tasks

Teachers indicate (CM2, 2022) that teaching nowadays brings a lot side tasks. They experience busy schedules, which makes supporting bereaved teenagers not always in the top of their minds. Some teachers are open to be there for the students, however the shortage in time limits their ability to do so. Teacher are afraid to lose sight of the teenager.

“Het onderwijs is een grote opeenstapeling van dingen die morgen af moeten. Voor de leerling met een verlies moet ik tijd voor vrijmaken om te denken: hoe gaat het nu? Als ik die afspraak niet maak, dan verzuip ik eigenlijk, dan heb ik paar weken later pas weer een afspraak, en dan kan de leerling al vastgelopen zijn. ik vind dat zelf ook kut. Dan veroordeel ik mezelf dat ik het vergeten ben.”

– CM2, teacher

Lack of exchange teachers restricts improvement of education

The teacher team exist of a diversity of individuals. Each with their own ways of teaching and offering support to students. From one another, teachers can learn a lot. However, the pressure in education results in a lack of time for teachers to learn from each other (CM2, 2022). In particular, they indicate offering support to teenagers can be a topic where exchange of experiences can be beneficial.

“Na een gebeurtenis van een verlies bij een leerling vind ik het moeilijk of ik iemand niet vergeet. Daar ben ik dan bang voor.”

- CM2, teacher

“We zouden veel meer bij elkaar in de les moeten kijken en veel meer over dit soort dingen moeten praten, maar ons bordjes is al een beetje vol.”

– CM2 teacher



Competences of teacher differ

The teacher staff exist of many individuals with their own competences. Some teachers feel like support of a bereaved teenager is not what they are capable of. A certain discomfort is experienced around supporting a bereaved teenager. This discomfort can be explained with the lack of knowledge amongst teachers about this topic (CM2, 2022). Some teachers indicate not knowing when and how to approach teenagers, and what their preferences are. Often there is no prior knowledge or experience in this topic, since the support on an emotional level is not covered in educational programs for teachers.

“Het is nooit onwil van een docent, maar het is onmacht om dit soort onderwerpen uit de weg te gaan.”

-CM2, teacher

Workshops for teachers about mental health, or specifically about grief, raises certain resistance by some teachers (WoD; SI1, 2020). Amongst some teachers the mindset exist: ‘supporting bereaved teenagers is not part of my job’.

The lack of knowledge and experience on the topic of grief and how to offer support can result in a certain anxiety to get into something they are not capable of (Keirse, 2020). Avoiding the topic at all is what can happen.

“Wij vinden het een beetje ongemakkelijk om erover te praten. Dat merk ik bij mijzelf ook. Ik vind het ook ongemakkelijk om bij dat meisje uit mijn mentorklas dit onderwerp aan te snijden. Omdat ik bang ben voor haar gevoeligheid hierin. Wanneer snij je het aan? Wanneer wordt het bespreekbaar?”

– CM2, teacher

Grade and behaviour are reference for how teenager is doing

Teenagers are wearing masks to hide their emotional state from their environment. This makes it difficult to assess the well-being of a teenager. Often grades and behaviour are used as an indicator to assess how the teenager is doing (CM2, 2022). However, this is not directly relatable to how the teenager is doing. Teenagers avoid to stand out, and may go in great lengths to hide their emotions in order to appear outwardly normal (Fiddelaers-Jaspers, 2007).

“De dood van een ouder is heel onzichtbaar. Dat is lastig voor een school om daar op in te spelen.”

– School social worker

Lack of protocol

Schools have procedures in case a teacher or student passes away. This includes a strategy for communication, the establishment of a temporary memorial place and a dedicated moment in class (CM2; SI4; SI3, 2022). The GGD provides access to this plan. However, there is no standard protocol for handling a parent’s passing, which possibly has a significant impact on a teenager’s everyday life.

There are significant differences between primary and secondary education. In primary school, parents typically participate actively in the school environment. In secondary education, the parent’s involvement becomes less prominent. The parent is, in general, less known by the school community. From the perspective of a school, the loss of a parent is experienced as a more “invisible” loss.

“ Mijn basisschool juf was heel lief. Ze had me ook een boekje gegeven om in te tekenen. En voor ouders was er een avond om stil te staan bij het overlijden van mijn vader.”

– CM1, teenager with parental loss (16y)

7.

Knowledge and experience of a teacher in offering support

Teachers may lack the knowledge and experience to support bereaved teenagers, leading to discomfort and avoidance of the topic. Grades and behavior are commonly used as indicators, but may not directly reflect how the teenager is doing. Teachers may lack in tools and protocols to offer support to students.

Factor related to teachers



8.

The students personal preferences for receiving social support in school

The support needed for each teenager in the school environment can vary for each individual. While some teenagers may see school as a distraction, others may prefer to talk about their grief and loss in this environment. The need for support also depends on individual factors, including the presence of strong support networks outside of school.

Factor related to the individual

School is a distraction

For some teenagers with a loss, school is experienced as a place that should remain unchanged. It is one thing in life they have autonomy in. They don't want a lot of their sadness and pain to arise in this setting. The participants indicated that they do not want to be perceived differently by others (CM1, 2022). Furthermore, school can function as a place of distraction, where grief is not at the forefront. It feels as a place where there is a distraction. Introducing their bereavement may contradict these feelings.

"School is een afleiding voor mij, in vind het überhaupt stom om het er over te hebben op school."

- GI1, teenager (15Y)

"Op het begin was het logischer geweest als je moest huilen. Mensen vroegen aan mij 'ben je nooit verdrietig?'. Juist wel. Ik wil er niet zo veel mee bezig zijn want dan zou ik mij juist afgezonderd voelen. "

- CM1, teenager (16Y)

Individual factors influencing the desired support:

(Spuij M. , 2017) addresses multiple factors influencing the grieving process:

- Unexpected versus anticipatory grief;
- The cause of death;
- The relationship with the loved one. The impact of a family member is usually the greatest;
- The social support including the remaining parent, friends, peers and teachers etc.;
- The way a teenagers is raised;
- The effect of the changes that take place because of the loss. For example: different atmosphere at home, reduced contact with family of the lost parent, financial difficulties, etc.;
- The influence of culture and rituals;
- Own coping abilities: teenagers with a higher resilience shows positive adaptation towards changing circumstances (Sandler, Ayers, Tein, Coxe, & Chow, 2008).
- Cognitive abilities stimulate the coping process (Stokes, 2009). It concerns to what extend the teenagers can express their story, feelings and share memories.



2.6

Key insights

The chapter aimed to provide background information about grief, social support, and what factors influence the way social support is perceived by grieving teenagers. The research activities, including context mapping interviews, expert interviews, literature study, and observation, brought the following key insights:

i. Grief

Grief that follows after the death of a loved one can result in physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. Teenagers perceive grief more intensely compared to children and adults since it aligns with the rapid transitions of their adolescence. Between 12 and 18 years old is a vulnerable period. As a result, it is crucial to invest in support aiming to prevent negative consequences on their mental health in the long term.

ii. Social support

Social support is the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and is part of a supportive social network. Research stresses the importance of social support for the adaptation of bereavement. The social support network may include family, friends, peers, teachers, support groups, religious/spiritual resources, etc. Schools are particularly important organisations considering teenagers social support network because they spend a large amount of time at school.

iii. Grief in secondary education

Several factors influence the perceived social support at school. These factors can be either positively or negatively related to peers, teachers, or the bereaved teenager. Below are the factors that influence grief of the bereaved teenager in secondary education:

Peers:

- 1) Their peers knowledge about grief and their ability to offer support;
- 2) The shift in relationships between bereaved teenagers and peers;
- 3) The bereaved teenager's feeling of safety to express your loss and grief

Teachers:

- 4) The teacher's acknowledgment of the loss;
- 5) The bereaved teenager receiving the possibility to express their loss and grief;
- 6) Teachers feel pressure due to tasks in education;
- 7) Knowledge and experience of a teacher in offering support;

Bereaved teenager:

- 8) The students personal preferences for receiving social support in the school environment.

General insights:

- iv. In general teenagers with a loss of a loved one want **to be seen, heard, and acknowledged in their loss** and desire compassion for their situation. At the same time, they do want to be **treated the same** as their peers. The contrary in these needs makes offering the right support at school complex. The need for sensitivity in approaching and interacting with the bereaved teenager by the school staff is required.
- v. Expressing feels is often experienced as a taboo by teenagers. A **safe space** is required to initiate this topic.
- vi. Parental loss does not occur frequently during the secondary school period. Therefore there is often **no protocol or uniform plan**. The lack of protocol causes significant differences in perceived social support between teenagers with parental loss. Bereaved teenagers do not always know how to find support in school. As a result some teenagers do not feel the space to share feelings of grief in the school environment.
- vii. **The mentor** is often considered the **dedicated person to offer support** to teenagers who have experienced parental loss. However, the mentor's approach may not always match the desires of the teenager, even though they offer support to the best of their abilities. When this **mismatch** occurs, there is often **no customization** in place to provide social support from other employees in the school.
- viii. **The school social worker** is often seen as the person in the school to approach by teachers when **having questions** about offering support to bereaved teenagers.

Conclusions

This chapter highlights the complexity of grief and the challenges faced when offering and receiving social support in the school environment. In general, not all teenagers may require social support in the school environment depending on their personal preferences. However, the experienced availability of social support is important. Nevertheless, not all stakeholders are aware of the need to offer social support or lack the capability to do so. As a result, teenagers often rely on chance encounters with individuals within the educational system, such as mentors, teachers, or peers, whether their desired social support needs will be met. Some teenagers do experience a lack of social support. The feeling that there is no space for grief may arise at school.

In the following chapter, the changes of social support over time is explained by sharing the experiences of three teenagers with parental loss. These stories highlight design opportunities based on the needs and experiences of the bereaved teenagers and teachers.



3. Define

social support journey

In this chapter the social support in the secondary school environment over time is further explained by three different stories of teenagers with parental loss. First the differences in perceived social support between the three persona's will be empathised (3.1). Next the stories of Zoë, Frank and Sarah will be told (3.2). The three stories and the teachers' perspective are mapped over time with experiences and identified needs concerning social support (3.3).

Chapter overview:

- 3.1 Personas
- 3.2 The stories in time
- 3.3 Key insights

3.1

Personas

What are persona's

Personas are used to communicate and synthesize the context mapping research. The three different stories represent how the different factors, described in Chapter 2, influence the perceived social support from teaches and peers. Personas are fictional, generalized characters that represent real people. Personas are based on real data gathered during this research (Boeijen, Daalhuizen, & Zijlstra, 2020). In this project the persona's help to communicate experiences, values and

needs in order to empathise with the user group. In this project the stories of Zoë, Frank and Sarah are based on the experiences and needs of multiple interviews and group sessions (CM1; GI1; CS, 2022). All the interviews together were the grouped in three fictive biographies.

The three stories of three teenagers with parental loss, named Zoë, Frank and Sarah can be found on the following pages.



Zoë

De vader van Zoë is overleden toen ze in groep 8 zat. Begin groep 8 kreeg hij te horen dat hij kanker had en dat het niet goed te behandelen was. Hoewel Zoë doorhad dat het slecht nieuws was, was ze zich toen nog niet bewust van alle gevolgen van deze ziekte. Na het nieuws hebben ze met het gezin een laatste verre reis kunnen maken. Vijf maanden na het nieuws overleed de vader van Zoë. Inmiddels is het verlies vijf jaar geleden. Zoë is 16 jaar en zit in 4 havo.

Het verlies speelt bij Zoë niet elke dag, maar het verdriet kan haar af en toe overvallen. Bijvoorbeeld wanneer ze aan haar examenuitreiking denkt of wanneer ze andere vaders trots langs de kant ziet staan bij haar voetbal wedstrijd. Het maakt haar verdrietig als ze bedenkt hoe trots haar vader geweest zou zijn.

Na het verlies voelde het als een warm bad op haar basisschool. De ouders van andere kinderen waren erg betrokken, zo brachten ze regelmatig maaltijden bij haar thuis. Ook de juf was erg lief. Er was een plekje voor haar vader ingericht in het lokaal. En ze gaf haar een boekje om in te tekenen.

Nu op de middelbare school is Zoë niet zo bezig met haar verlies. School is eigenlijk wel een fijne afleiding. Zoë wilt daar ook niet anders behandeld worden dan andere. Wanneer zij de les uit mag om een kaarsje aan te steken op Allerzielen hoeft zij dat niet. Ze wilt daarin niet anders zijn en dat mensen anders naar haar gaan kijken. Aan haar verlies besteed ze thuis wel aandacht. Daar praat Zoë regelmatig met haar moeder over haar vader en over hun verdriet.

De docenten bij Zoë op school weten dat zij haar vader verloren is. Elk jaar wanneer zij een nieuwe mentor heeft wordt dit wel even aangestipt tijdens het eerste gesprekje. Met sommige mentoren heeft ze gewoon niet zo veel, daar hoeft ze het er niet mee over te hebben. Dan voelt het ook een beetje alsof ze het moeten vragen omdat het bij hun takenpakket hoort.

De meeste mensen in de omgeving van Zoë weten van het verlies van haar vader. Toch blijft het lastig voor Zoë wanneer je zoiets deelt met nieuwe mensen. Mensen gaan er toch snel vanuit dat je twee ouders hebt. Wanneer vertel je het dan aan mensen? En met wie wil ik dit delen? Zoë wilt toch het goede moment hiervoor kiezen en dat het de aandacht krijgt die haar verlies verdient.

Verlies in
het dagelijks leven

Op school

Docenten

Leeftijdsgenoten



Frank

Frank zat in 3 vwo toen zijn vader de diagnose kanker kreeg. Het besef is er bij Frank maar al te goed dat zijn vader dit niet gaat overleven. Na de diagnose gaat het snel. De laatste verjaardag van zijn vader vierden ze nog met het gezin in het ziekenhuis. Een week later overleed de vader van Frank. Frank is dan 14 jaar oud.

Verlies in
het dagelijks leven

Inmiddels is het een jaar verder. Het overlijden van zijn vader is een enorm harde klap. Frank voelt zich lusteloos sinds het verlies en heeft maar weinig focus voor schoolwerk. Sinds het overlijden is de familie is erg betrokken bij het gezin. Zo komen ooms en tantes wekelijks langs om op te hoogte te zijn van hoe het gaat met Frank, zijn broertje en zijn moeder. Dat maakt hun band heel sterk.

Op school

Na de diagnose van zijn vader heeft Frank iedereen op school ingelicht. Hij vond het fijn om te delen met docenten, omdat hij niet zeker wist hoe het invloed zou hebben op zijn humeur en schoolwerk.

Na het verlies is Frank een aantal maanden niet naar school geweest. Zijn moeder hield in die tijd contact met school. Frank zijn hoofd stond niet naar school. Voor Frank was het gek om weer terug naar school te keren. Het leek wel of iedereen's blik op hem gericht was.

Docenten

Frank had een super fijne mentor in de derde klas. Hij was altijd erg betrokken en nam de tijd om op de hoogte te zijn van hoe het met Frank was. Eigenlijk vanaf het moment van de diagnose tot op heden, terwijl hij op dit moment niet meer de mentor is van Frank. Zo kwam hij van de week nog BBQ'en bij hem thuis met zijn moeder en broertje.

Vakdocenten leken het onderwerp juist wel te ontwijken. Frank heeft daar niks van gehoord, ook geen steunbetuiging toen hij weer terugkeerde naar school. Voor Frank voelt dat gek, alsof ze doen alsof het niet gebeurt is. Het zorgt ervoor dat hij minder zin heeft om zijn best te doen in deze lessen.

Leeftijdsgenoten

De klasgenoten en vrienden van Frank waren erg betrokken rond de uitvaart en stuurde hem een kaart op toen zijn vader overleed. Na het overlijden is Frank eigenlijk altijd erg gezellig en blij bij zijn vrienden. Ook al voelt hij zich niet zo. Het masker komt vanzelf. Voor Frank voelt alsof iedereen verwacht dat hij gezellig is en dat hij niet bezig is met het verlies. Het lijkt wel of zijn vrienden het na een paar maanden een beetje vergeten zijn, terwijl hij er elke dag mee bezig is. Terwijl anderen gericht zijn op leuke feestjes, voelt het voor Frank alsof de tijd nog steeds stil staat.



Sarah

Vanaf dat Sarah 13 jaar is weet ze dat haar vader uitzaaiingen heeft in zijn ruggenwervel en het niet gaat overleven. Hoewel de doktoren zeiden dat het een wonder zou zijn dat hij kerst zou halen, overlijdt hij pas 5 jaar later. 18 jaar is Sarah dan. Ze zit in 5 havo en moet nog haar laatste 3 vakken afronden.

Verlies in
het dagelijks leven

Thuis is iedereen zo anders bezig met het verlies. Dat maakt het soms lastig om erover te praten, want iedereen heeft zo zijn eigen verdriet. Thuis heeft Sarah het er daarom niet vaak over. Iedereen gaat er anders mee om. Haar zusje bijvoorbeeld, die praat er het liefste nooit over.

Steun en erkenning vindt Sarah bij een rouwgroep. Hier komen andere tieners die ook een verlies mee hebben gemaakt. Sarah voelt zich verbonden met de andere tieners, ook al is hun verlies anders.

Op school

Toen Sarah haar vader verloor moest ze eindexamen doen voor haar laatste drie vakken. Die vakken had ze het jaar ervoor nog niet gehaald. Sarah is erg gemotiveerd om het op school goed te doen. Ze vindt in ieder geval dat het op een vlak, dus school, wel goed moet gaan en vindt afleiding bij haar schoolwerk.

Docenten

Haar mentor uit de derde heeft een ze een keer gesproken toen haar vader nog ziek was. Tijdens het gesprek deelde ze over hoe lastig het was dat haar vader ging overlijden. Hoewel de mentor erg betrokken was tijdens het gesprek, en deelde dat hij iets soortgelijks had meegemaakt, heeft hij daarna nooit meer contact gezocht met Sarah. Sarah vond dit erg pijnlijk.

Het was voor Sarah erg lastig om terug te keren naar school na de uitvaart. Van haar drie vakdocenten hoorde ze niks. Niemand vroeg hoe het met haar ging. Ze voelde zich erg alleen en onbegrepen op school. Laatst bijvoorbeeld overviel het verdriet haar tijdens een biologieles, toen de les over kanker ging. Iedereen in de klas keek haar glazig aan, terwijl de tranen over haar gezicht rolden. Ook de biologiedocent ging door met de les.

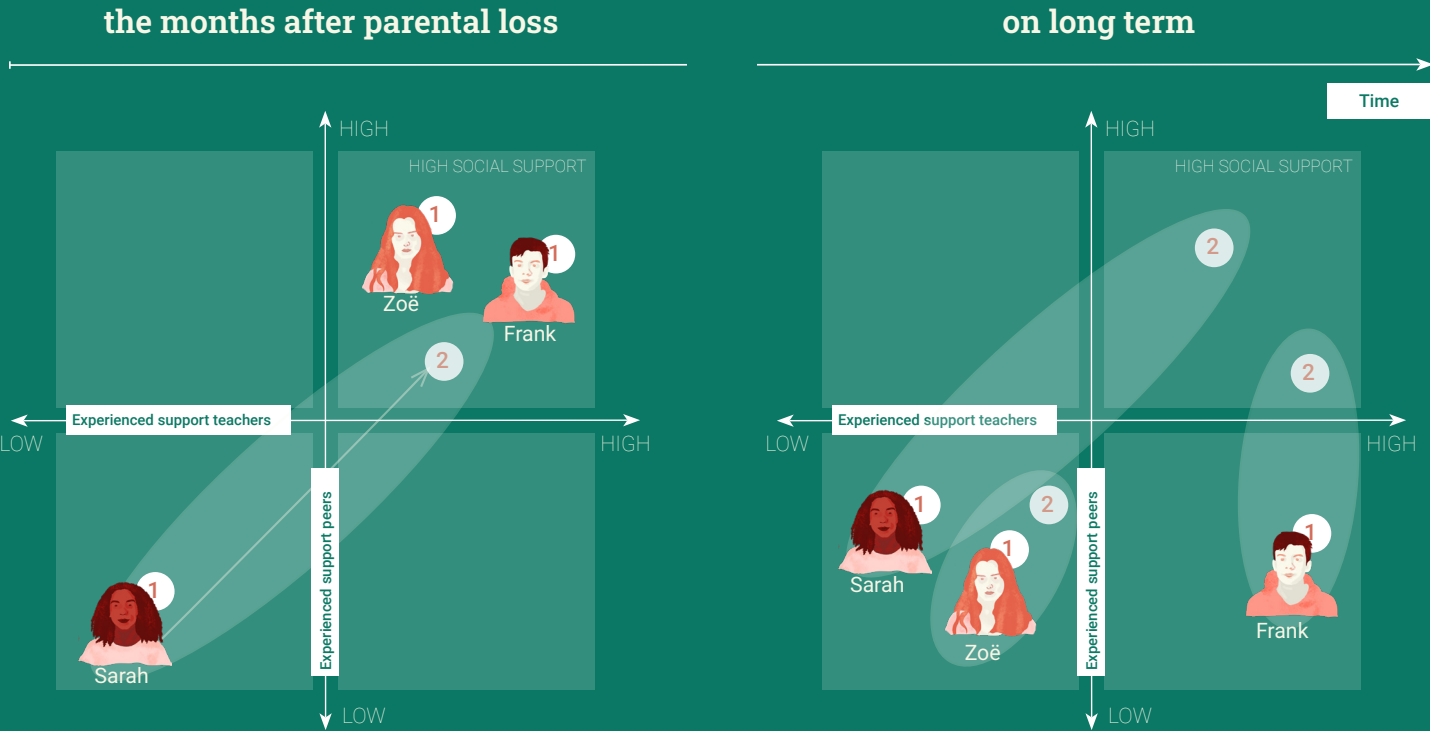
Leeftijdsgenoten

Hetzelfde geldt voor haar klasgenoten. De klasgenoten waar ze goed contact mee had negeren haar sinds ze terug is. Ze denkt dat ze het te ongemakkelijk vinden om er naar te vragen. Ze heeft haar verwachtingen over haar leeftijdsgenoten bijgesteld zodat ze ook niet teleurgesteld kan raken en trekt zich erg terug op school. Ze is blij als ze haar diploma heeft gehaald en weg kan van deze school.

figure 16. The experienced social support over time

The experienced social support after a loss of three teenagers in the school environment

- 1 Perceived support
- 2 Desired support



The differences between the stories

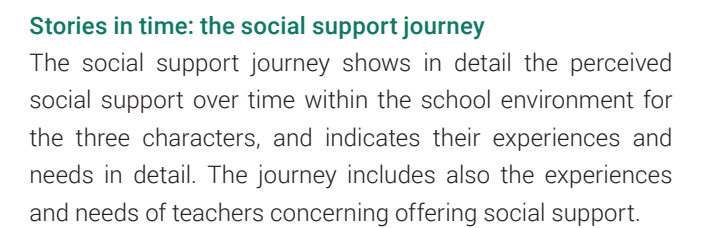
The stories are divided on axes to empathise the differences and similarities (figure 16). The ages show the support experienced from teachers and peers for each individual. An ideal situation is where both the support of teachers and peers are experienced. In other situations the support of either the teacher or peers is experienced. A more undesired situation is where there is neither perceived support from teachers nor from peers. This situation can be worrying if the teenager lacks in strong social connections outside the school environment.

For Zoë, Frank and Sarah the perceived social support from peers and teachers is experienced differently.

Zoë reperceives high social support from mainly her peers and medium from the teachers. Frank primarily receives high support from peers and teachers, and specifically the peer support decreases over time. And for Sarah both the peer as the teacher support is low, and she mainly lacks social support in the school environment.

Similarities

However, the experiences of social support from the stakeholders are totally different for Zoë, Frank and Sarah, there is also a similarity. In general, the experienced support from both teachers and peers declines over time.

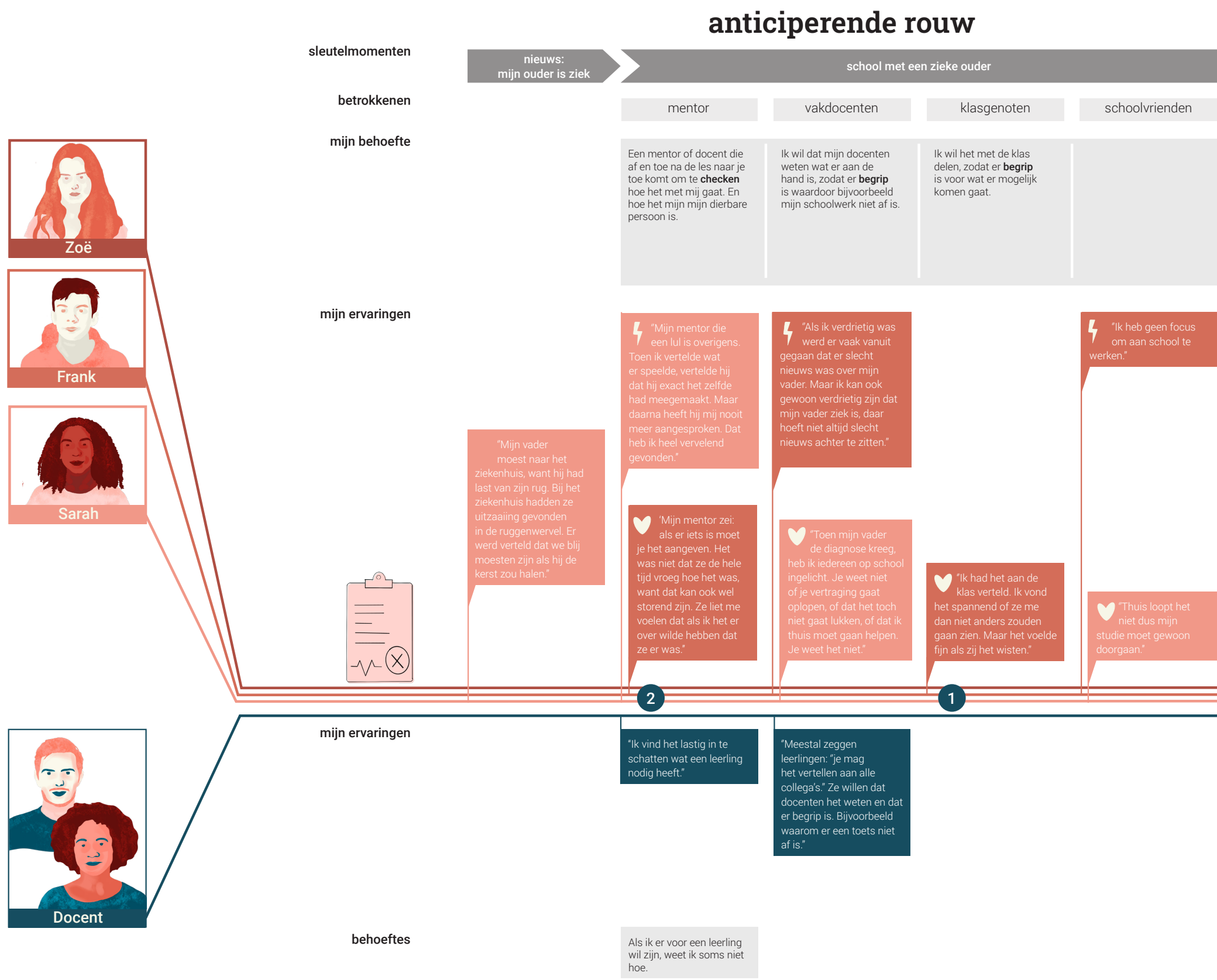


From both field as desk research design opportunities emerged. These are indicated with an icon in the journey. The design opportunities address the current needs of the stakeholders which are not always met right now. The design opportunities are further explained in chapter 4.

Three main phases

The timeline shows three main stages over time: before, short after the actual death and in the long term. The time frames are explained:

figure 17. The social support journey after parental loss



Support during Anticipatory grief

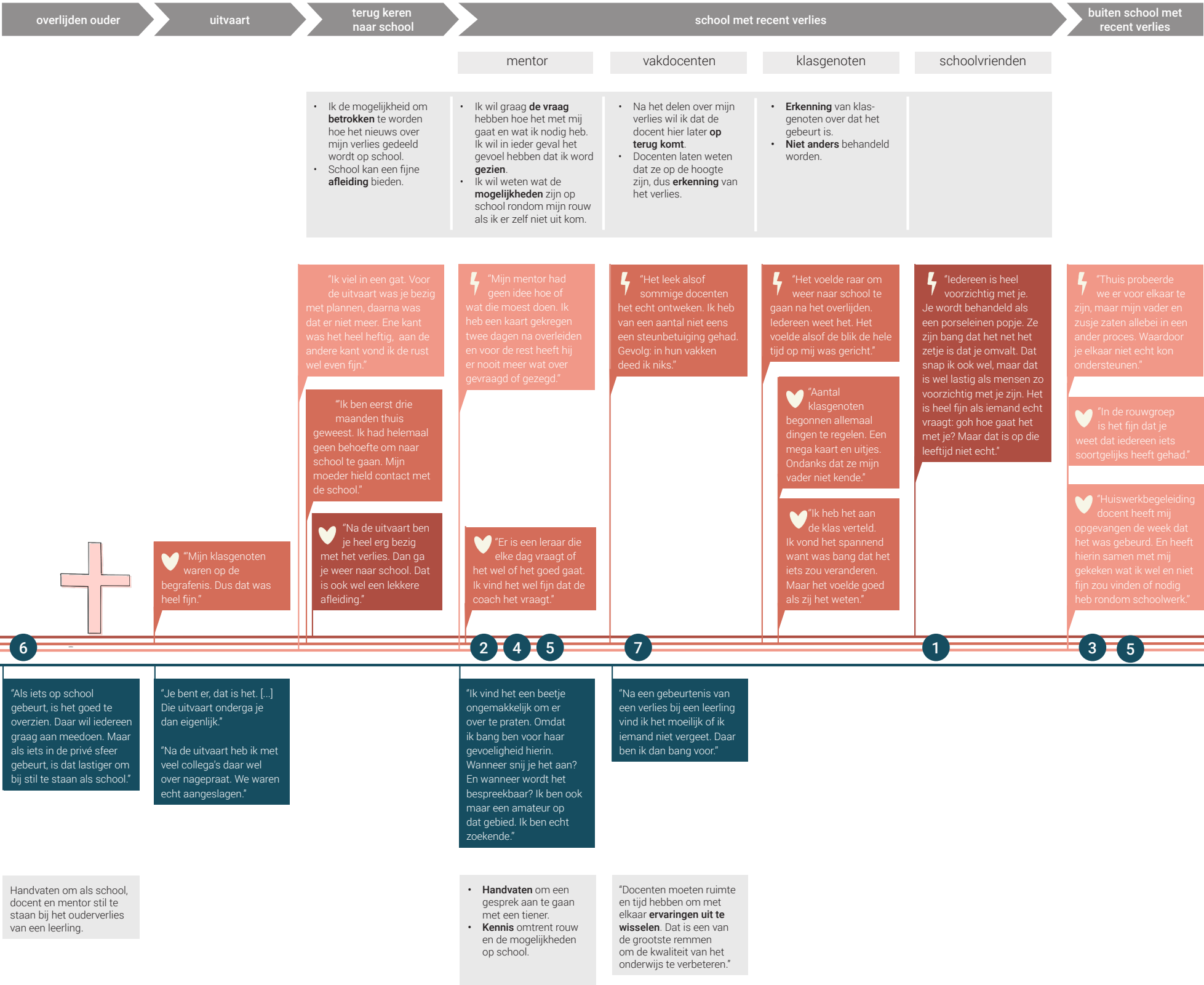
When a parent receives bad news regarding a specific health outcome with the possibility of death, anticipatory grief starts. The realisation of the consequences of the news starts to sink in by the teenager. Decisions have to be made, such as sharing the news in school or not. Either only telling their teachers or also telling their peers the news.

There are significant uncertainties at this time regarding how the disease will progress and what its effects will be over time. Teenagers experience school as a place where they can take off their minds or they feel distracted in class. During this time, the mentor is frequently involved, and some teenagers prefer that the news is shared with the teachers' team. Some teenagers decide to share this with their peers, while others decide not to.

During the interviews it raised that some teenagers experienced a lack of acknowledgement of the loss from their mentor and other teachers after their return to school. Others experienced a teacher that was very involved and thinking along with them after their return to school.

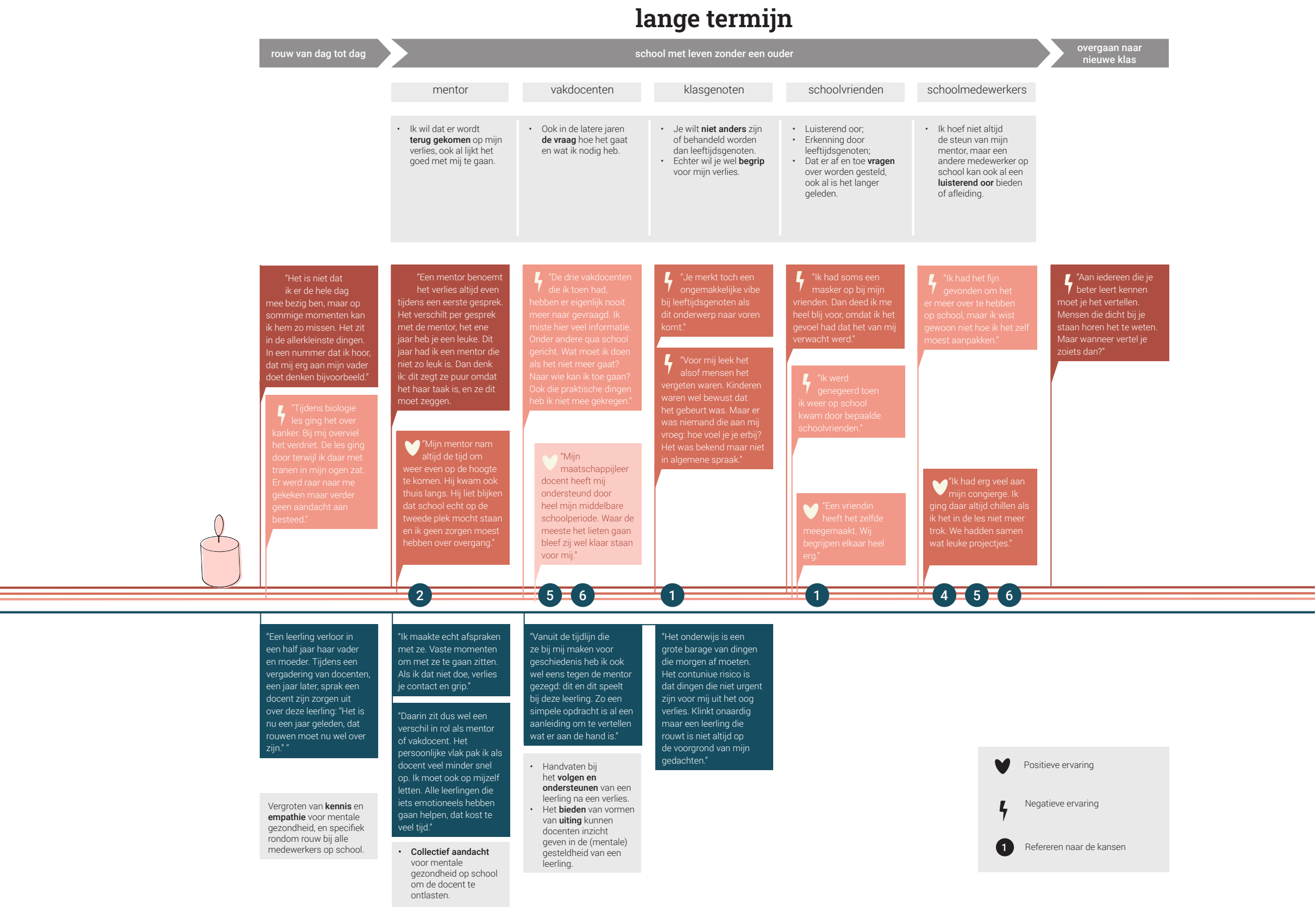
Teachers commonly want to be there for the teenager. Unfortunately, they often don't know the teenager's needs. Teachers are also busy and worried about losing track of the teenager.

het verlies



Teachers are not always aware of the effect the loss can have on the long term. The mental health of a teenager is often based on grades or behaviour within the classroom. Because of the pressure in the educational system, some teachers lose track of the students, and if the grades or behaviour of the teenager seems alright, it is typically considered that the student is doing well.

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3.3

Key insights

The personas and the support journey share the experiences, needs, and desires of teenagers with parental loss in three stages: before, shortly after the actual death, and in the long term. The journey also includes teachers' experiences and needs concerning offering social support.

The main takeaways are:

- ix. **The availability of support** by peers and teachers is different for each individual with parental loss in the school environment;
- x. While there are quite some teachers willing to offer social support, they sometimes feel they **lack the knowledge and experience** needed to provide effective support. They feel they need to be **equipped** with the necessary knowledge and experience to provide more effective support.
- xi. **The experienced support decreases over time**, even though the desire for support by the bereaved teenagers remains present. Some experience experts refer to only one conversation with someone from the school staff close after the parental death. However, this attention towards the students' loss is desired over a longer period of time;
- xii. Teachers and peers around the bereaved individual indicate being **insecure about their capabilities** to offer support. They often refer to a lack of knowledge and experience to offer informational support. However, bereaved teenagers often need **emotional support** to feel seen, heard, and have someone pay attention to them. Additionally, it is important for school staff to **be aware of the support pathways** available in school, which can offer informational support and other types of assistance.
- xiii. The social support journey encompasses six needs for both the teenagers and the teachers to have a valuable interaction: **safety, expression, autonomy, inviting, understanding, and empathy**.

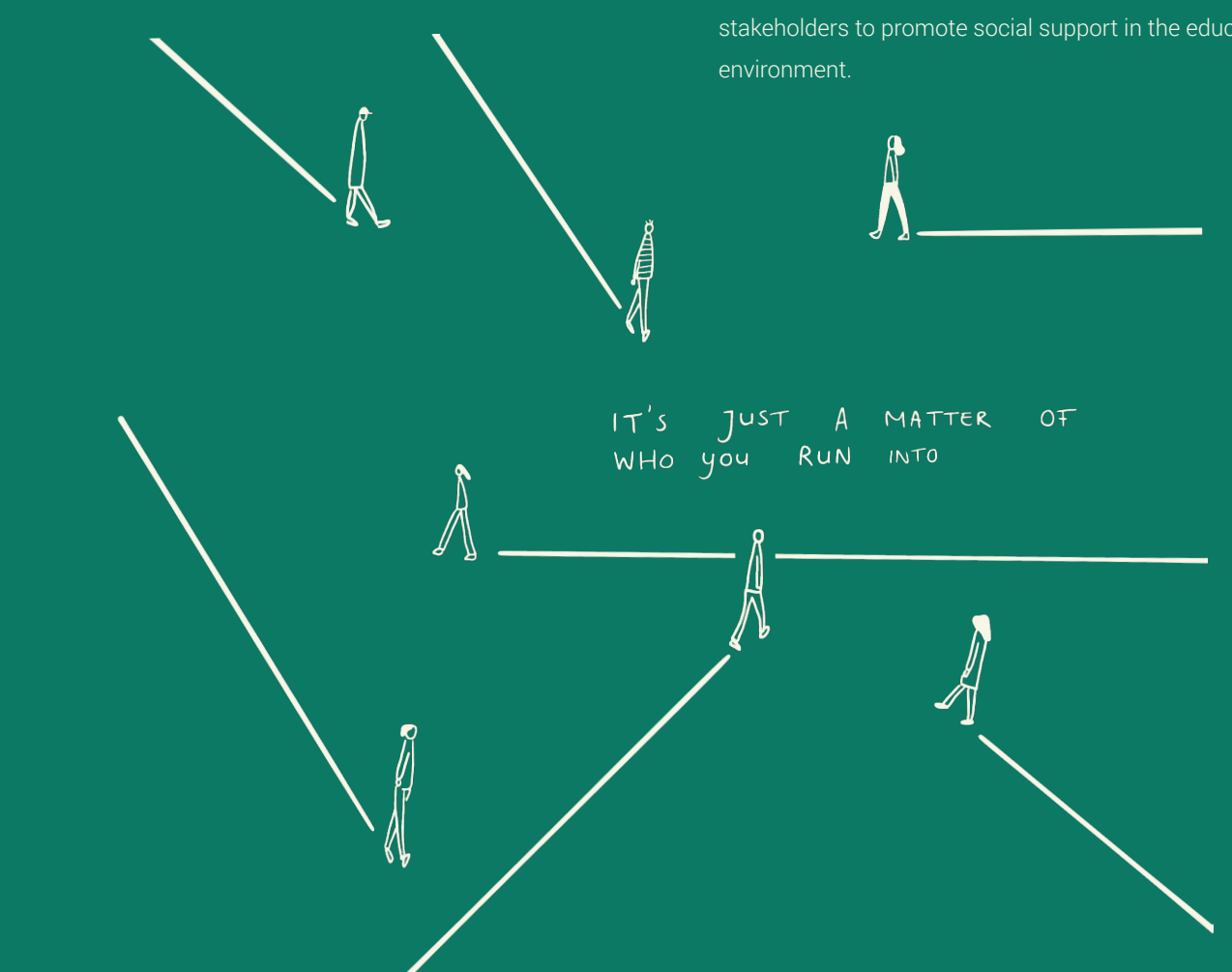
Conclusion

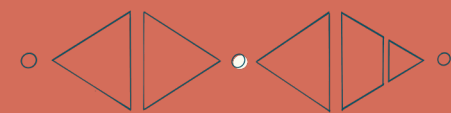
Within the school system, teenagers and teachers have a cognitive relationship with each other. However, if a teenager faces parental loss, an additional emotional relationship might be desired. This new relationship requires both stakeholders to reinvent their bond.

Furthermore, opposing needs create a tension field for teenagers who want to be seen and acknowledged in their grief, while also wanting to be treated the same as everyone else. Additionally, support groups such as teachers and peers often encounter a lack of experience and knowledge in offering support.

Therefore, teachers, peers, and bereaved teenagers need empowerment to initiate and maintain social support. Clear pathways that highlight opportunities for support and offer guidance in having supportive interactions should be provided by a design intervention. It is crucial to create a safe space for both stakeholders, the bereaved teenagers, peers, and teachers, to give and receive social support. Providing social support opportunities to each teenager who experience parental loss, will help create a more supportive setting within the school context.

The next chapters will explore a design that acts as a facilitator to initiate a safe space for the involved stakeholders to promote social support in the educational environment.





4. Design focus

strengthening social support

This chapter focuses on the design opportunities to strengthen social support in the school environment. It will start with an overview of the identified design opportunities (4.1). Then, the vision is shaped, and a design opportunity will be determined (4.2). The design process will be directed with a design goal (4.3) and the interaction qualities the design should evoke (4.4).

Chapter overview:

- 4.1 Identified design opportunities
- 4.2 Design focus
- 4.3 Design goal
- 4.4 Interaction qualities
- 4.5 Key insights

4.1

Identified design opportunities

Designing for Social support

The research has revealed significant differences in perceived social support among bereaved teenagers. The focus of the study's design will be to enhance opportunities for social support exchange for each teenager who has experienced parental loss. Heaney and Israel (2008) have suggested several categories of social support interventions, shown below. The different categories can also exist next to each other by combining it.

Enhancing existing network ties:

Improving the qualities of the existing relations to address particular (mental) health challenges. Interventions to enhance existing relationships often includes activities to build skills for offering effective support, provision and receiving. Giving network members, for instance, training in support-related skills.

Developing new social network linkages:

When the current network is too small, overloaded, or unable to provide adequate support, there is frequently designed for new linkages. The interventions involve bringing in individuals who have already dealt with the situation or include people who are going through similar life transitions as the focus person.

Enhancing networks through the use of community health workers:

Enable natural helpers of the community with interventions to provide support. Natural helpers are members of a community to whom other network members naturally turn to for advice, support and other types of aid. The natural helpers will be in a consultative relationship with health professions who provide them with information on the topic. An example of using community health workers is facilitating training in health topics.

Enhancing networks through community capacity building and problem solving:

These are interventions that increase the involvement community members in decision making and resolving community problems. As a result, the community's social networks are strengthened. An example is facilitation of participation groups for identifying and solving problems.

figure 18. Designing for social support

Enhancing existing network ties



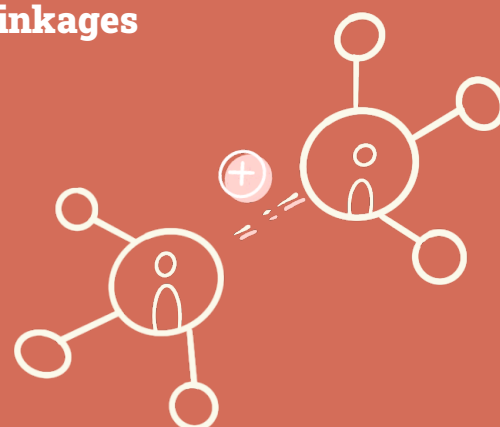
1

Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and peers

2

Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and teacher

Developing new social network linkages



3

Offer grief support groups for bereaved teenagers within school facilitated by external organisations

4

Integrate the role of the social workers more into the classroom

Enhancing networks through the use of community health workers



5

Integrate the role of the social workers more into the classroom

Enhancing networks through community capacity building and problem solving



6

Involve school staff in the creation of grief protocols that address the social support needs of bereaved teenagers

Identified design opportunities

Both desk and field research have identified a range of needs and desires, and based on these findings, design opportunities have been identified to address unmet needs and desires. The design opportunities have been mapped using the “design for social support” model (Israel, 2000), as shown in figure (figure 18).

The identified design opportunities to enhance the social support in the school environment are described below:

1

Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and peers

Enlarge death education in secondary education. This includes offering lessons about loss and grief. The design direction is focussed on normalising the topic of death and grief and on increasing empathy for peers with a loss. The teacher can be supported with digital means to offer the lessons, like an interactive game. Or teachers can approach the topic in general, like a project day about the death rituals around the world. By improving the relationship between bereaved teenagers and their peers, it is possible to reduce avoidance behaviour from peers and increase emotional support for the bereaved teenager.

2

Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and teacher

Offer teachers guidance in supporting bereaved teenagers. This includes enlarging the knowledge of teachers concerning the topic of grief. Next, provide teachers and bereaved teenagers with tools to guide the interaction. This can include tools to make it easier for teenagers to express themselves. The design direction is to enlarge the emotional support of teachers towards the bereaved teenager.

3

Offer grief support groups for bereaved teenagers within school facilitated by external organisations

Give teenagers low key possibilities to meet peers with similar loss experiences by offering grief support groups within the school. External organisations, like Rouwnetwerk Jong and Humanitas, can guide these groups. This design direction addresses the instrumental, informational and emotional support. External organisations can also facilitate guest lectures in class or to teachers to enlarge the knowledge about grief.

4

Integrate the role of the social workers more into the classroom

Lower the threshold for teenagers to get in contact with the school social worker. Make the social workers more familiar to the students, by giving the social worker a more central place within the school environment. This can be with guest lessons about for example mental health. The social worker has the capability to offer both informational as emotional support.

5

Support natural helpers within the school environment to offer support

Empower natural helpers to offer support to bereaved teenagers. Natural helpers can be teachers or other employees within the school, who are experienced as easy to approach by students. The natural helpers will be supported by community server worker, like the school social worker. An example can be workshops offered by community health workers that increases the knowledge of natural helpers. Or facilitating contact moments between the natural helpers to share experiences. A design intervention can also focus on creating space for support by facilitating this contact between the natural helper and the bereaved teenager. This design directions empowers natural helpers to offer support to bereaved teenagers.

6

Involve school staff in the creation of grief protocols that address the social support needs of bereaved teenagers

Offer schools support and guidance in creating their own vision and associate protocols concerning the support of bereaved teenagers. The teacher staff can be guided in doing this by co-creation session. The investment in such activities enlarges awareness and knowledge among the staff about this topic. It offers school to be prepared for parental loss of students and results in an uniform plan for possibility of equal support for each student with parental loss.

4.2 Design focus

Vision

The vision illustrates an ideal situation of social support in the school environment in the long term. Nowadays, there are significant differences among bereaved individuals in how they perceive the support in the school environment. Multiple factors can lead to a positive or negative experience of social support in the school environment. Within this ideal situation, there are no differences in individual opportunities for social support.

The vision for social support in secondary education is to ensure that every student can have equal access to social support, regardless of which teacher they encounter, the teacher's competencies, or their peer group. In an ideal world, every student should feel that social support is readily available. The goal is to create an environment where each student has access to the same level of social support, so that no one feels unsupported or overlooked.

Choice

The design opportunities mentioned in the previous section are mapped based on impact and effort, see figure 19.

Impact

Emotional support is preferred for teenagers in the school environment. Improving the support from the people they see daily (1, 2, 5, and 6) might have the biggest impact. However, it might also be more challenging since it consists of normalizing the topic of grief and loss with teachers and students, and changes at the organizational level require more effort to succeed.

Teachers can provide teenagers with a stable source of support (2), as they are present in the school environment on a daily basis, they are in an adult phase, and have experience with the target group. However, it's important to keep in mind that different teachers may have varying competencies and preferences when it comes to providing support.

To address these individual differences, one approach could be to facilitate contact between natural helpers (5). This can help create a more diverse and flexible network of support within the school environment that takes into account the varying needs and preferences of different students, which cannot always be addressed by their mentor, for example.

It is also important to note that teenagers often seek support from their peers (1) as they feel more comfortable and understood by people of their own age. However, peers themselves are undergoing rapid transitions and changes, and may feel uncomfortable with the topic, making it challenging for them to provide consistent or reliable support.

Effort

Considering the project's time frame, it is crucial to acknowledge that achieving designs for systematic changes may not be feasible (6). Moreover, normalizing the topic of grief for teenagers will require significant effort and commitment from the teachers and staff. Starting with small design interventions to demonstrate their positive impact could be an effective way to initiate change and pave the way for larger-scale improvements. Also, normalizing the topic of

death and bereavement, starting with the teachers and staff, will gradually have an influence on the students.

Conclusions

By choosing to focus on designing for support from natural helpers (5), such as teachers, concierges, and other school staff, a more sustainable and accessible support system for teenagers is created. Teenagers have the freedom to select an employee they prefer. These natural helpers are comfortable with the topic and can offer the best support. The school social worker will be involved in this plan to support the natural helpers by empowering them with tools, knowledge, and support systems.

There is a need for contact and social support between teachers and bereaved teenagers, but sometimes teachers lack knowledge and experience on how to provide such support, and teenagers may have difficulty reaching out. The design aims to address these issues by improving the interaction between natural helpers and bereaved teenagers by offering guidance and tools to facilitate contact and conversations about loss and grief.

The vision is to ensure that all students have
an equal chance to receive desired social support
from both their teachers and peers over time,
after experiencing a parental loss.

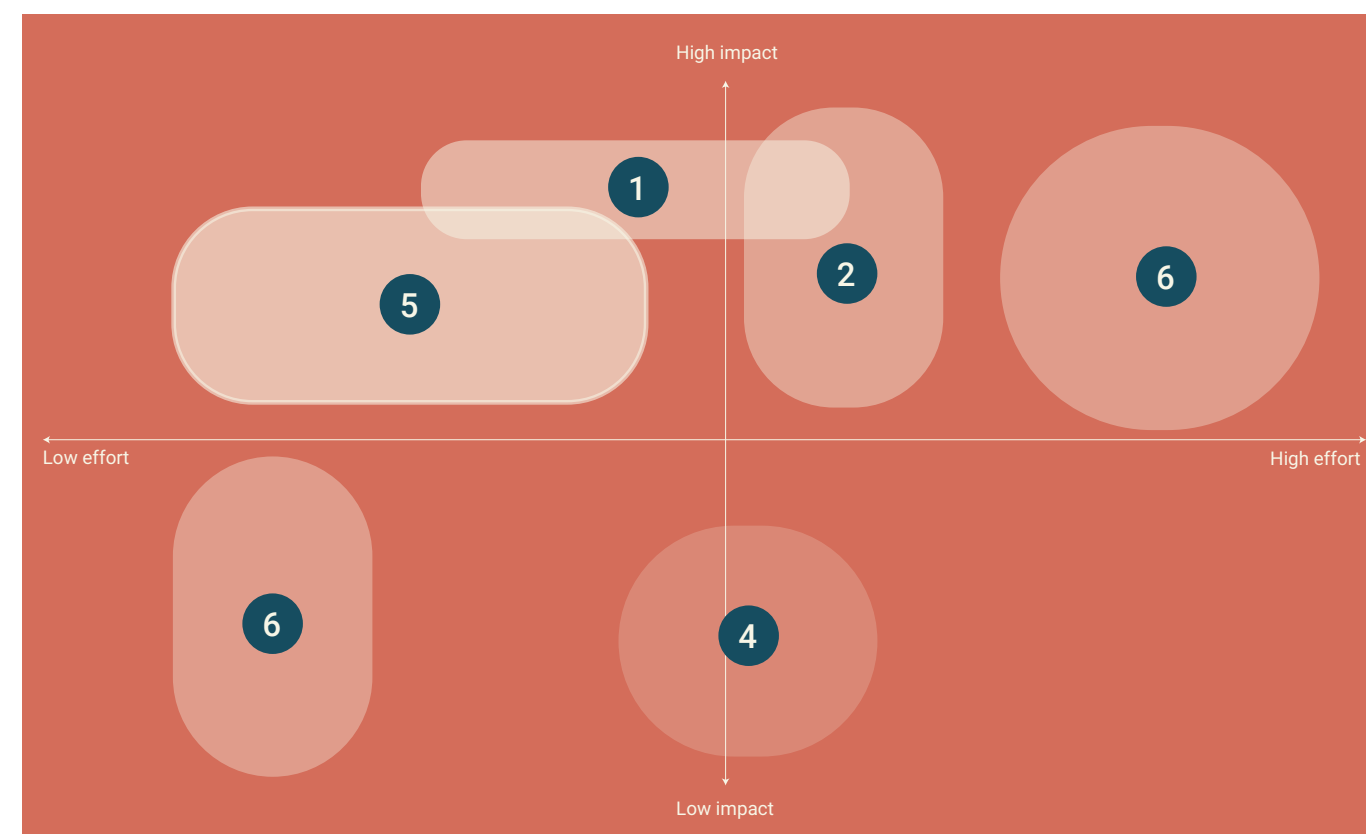


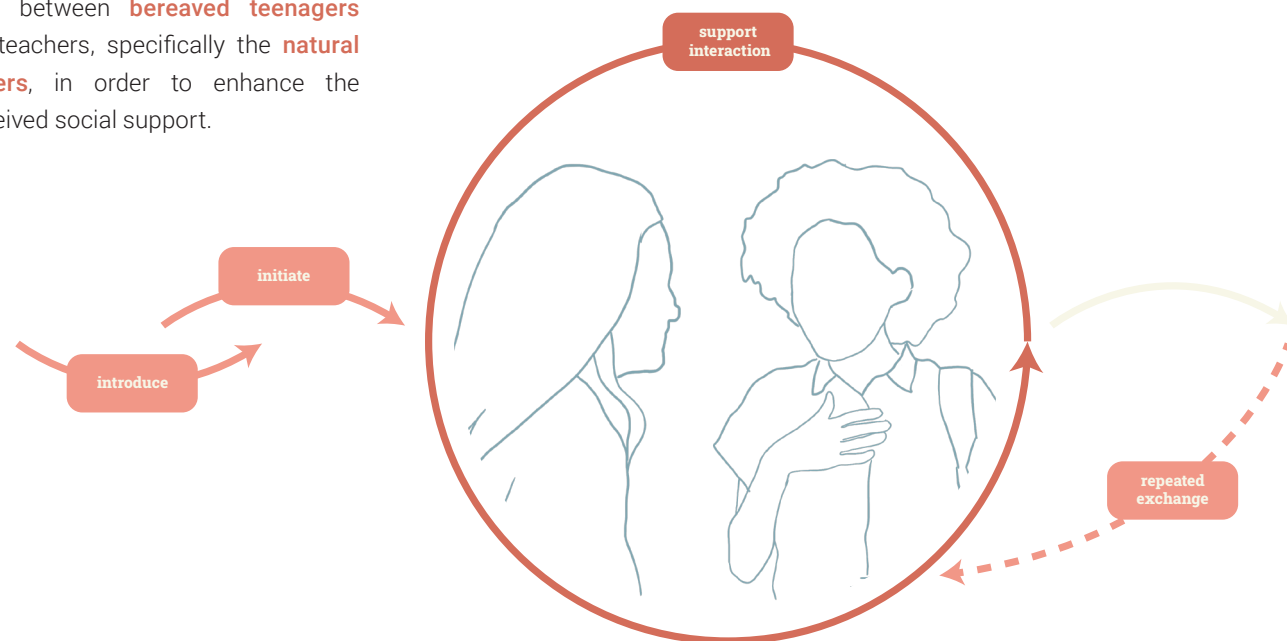
figure 19. Design opportunities mapped on the action priority matrix

4.3

Design goal

Design goal

The vision focusses on the long term changes within the school environment, the design goal shows a more short term goal in order to contribute to this vision within the time frame of this project. This design direction focusses on initiating and strengthening the bond between **bereaved teenagers** and teachers, specifically the **natural helpers**, in order to enhance the perceived social support.



introduce

The teacher is offered a tool to hand over to the teenager with a loss. This is the initiation to show that there is space for feelings of grief and school offers possibilities of support.

initiate

The teenager can decide whether or not to use the product. If the teenager desires support, they can easily initiate contact using the tool provided.

support interaction

The design offers the teenager an easy way to get in contact with the desired teacher. The teacher is provided with knowledge and empathy towards the teenager. The teenager is empowered with expressive means to initiate this support interaction.

repeated exchange

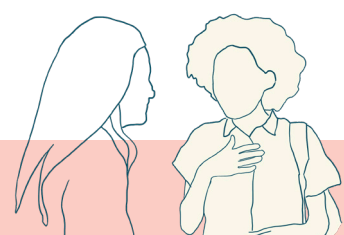
The toolbox provides options for repeatedly initiating this support interaction. It provides ways to connect with one another as desired.

The design goal is to create
a mental safe zone
for students and teachers to have
repeated exchanges about grief
to provide the **desired support**
for the bereaved student
in secondary education

4.4

Interaction qualities

The design should serve as a catalyst for the support from teachers towards bereaved teenagers. From the research until now, the design should evoke the following qualities in order to fit the needs of both teenager as the teacher:



Teenager with parental loss

The design should evoke safety to express your feelings of grief and share those with teachers.



Safety

The design should support teenagers in their expression of their grief and their needs.



Expression

The design should give the teenager autonomy in choosing what, when and with who to share about their loss and grief.



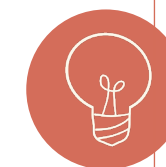
Autonomy

The design should lower the threshold to get in contact with a teacher about your grief.



Invite

The design should offer an understanding of the limits in others to offer support.



Understanding

The student should also become empathetic towards a teacher and understand the limitations of another individual.



Empathy

The design should enable teachers to feel safe to decide whether or not they are available to offer support

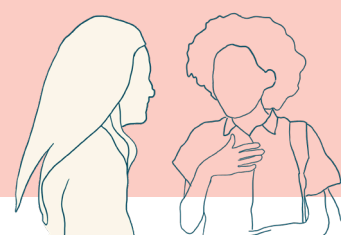
The design should empower the teacher to express their feelings and needs in offering support.

The design should offer the teachers to set boundaries and not cross them.

The design should facilitate the invitation for teachers to be available for students.

The design should offer the teacher understanding of grief and the possibilities within the school.

The design should offer the teacher empathy with the bereaved teenager in order to have more compassionate behaviour towards the teenager.



Teacher

Key insights

Conclusion

Research shows significant differences in how bereaved individuals perceive social support in the school environment. The created vision for social support in secondary education is to ensure that every teenager can receive equal access to social support, regardless of the teacher they encounter, the teacher's competencies, or their peer group.

Based on the research and the model of Heaney and Israel (2008) there are many design opportunities identified to focus on for enhancing social support within the school environment:

- Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and peers;
- Enhancing the relationship between bereaved teenager and teacher;
- Offer grief support groups for bereaved teenagers within school facilitated by external organisations;
- Integrate the role of the social workers more into the classroom;
- Support natural helpers within the school environment to offer support;
- Involve school staff in the creation of grief protocols that address the social support needs of bereaved teenagers.

By focusing on enhancing support from natural helpers, such as teachers, concierges, and other employees in school, a sustainable and accessible support system for teenagers can be created.

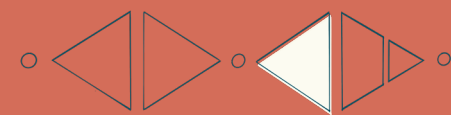
To enable the desired support to take place it is crucial to bring the right people together within the school organization. Emphasis should be placed on enabling bereaved teenagers to easily access natural helpers within the school environment, such that they can easily approach those who are willing to support them. This requires creating a safe space where feelings of grief can be expressed. By providing both teenagers and teachers with clear pathways for opportunities to engage in desired support.

The design goal is used as a guideline for the design phase:

The design goal is to create a mental safe zone for students and teachers to have repeated exchanges about grief to provide the desired support for the bereaved student in secondary education.

The following chapter contains the design steps taken to arrive at the final design.





5. Develop

ideation and conceptualization

This chapter contains the steps towards the final design presented in the next chapter. It describes the approach in order to explore design solutions fitting the design goal (5.1). It presents the three concepts that come forward during the different design activities (5.2). And it concludes with the insights combined to the choice of the final design solution (5.3).

Chapter overview:
5.1 Design approach
5.2 Concepts
5.3 Key insights

5.1 Design approach

In order to meet the design goal, multiple research activities were conducted to explore the potential solution space. These activities involved a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, bereaved teenagers and school social workers. Next to that also experienced experts and experts in the field of psychology were involved during the design process.

The design activities were carried out in several phases. The design process started with **creative sessions** that involved IDE students (CS1, 2023) and a psychologist from Humanitas (CS2, 2023) to investigate the solution space. **Co-creation sessions** were held with experienced experts to gain insight into their experiences in the school environment following parental loss, and to generate ideas in co-creation sessions (CC1, 2022). The session offered a variety of ideas which were combined together with the creative sessions into **three initial concepts**.

These concepts were presented to stakeholders, including teenagers with parental loss, teachers, school social workers and experience experts, in **co-reflection sessions**. During these sessions (CR1; CR2; CR3; CR4; 2023), the concepts

were carefully examined, iterated upon, or supplemented with new ideas proposed by the participants. The refined concepts are presented in this chapter.

After receiving feedback from the co-reflection sessions, the concepts underwent further refinement, leading to a single concept. In **reflective sessions** with experts the concept was further fine-tuned (Ref1; Ref2; Ref3, 2023), resulting in the design presented in chapter 6.

During the reflective sessions the following research question is answered:

Does the design meet the following interaction qualities for both the bereaved teenage and the teacher:

- Safety
- Expression
- Autonomy
- Invite
- Understanding
- Empathy

A visual of the design process is shown in figure 20.

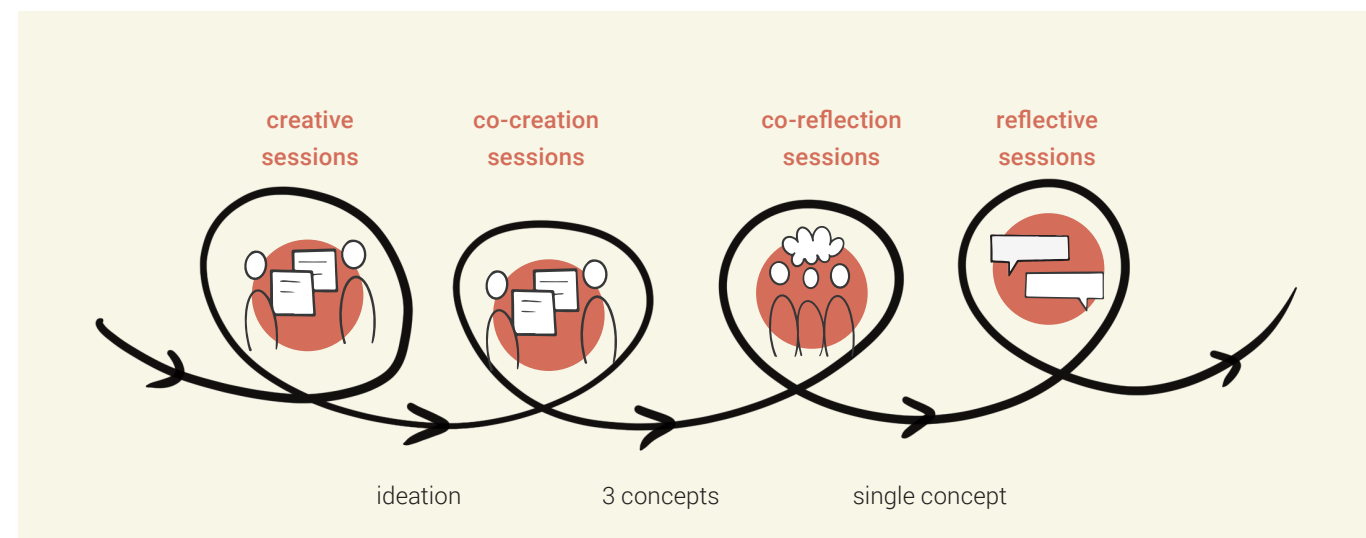


figure 20. Design process



figure 21. Creative session IDE students

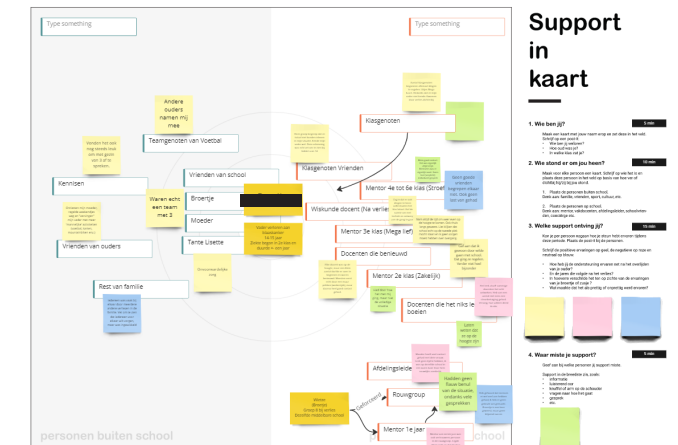


figure 22. Co-creation with experience experts

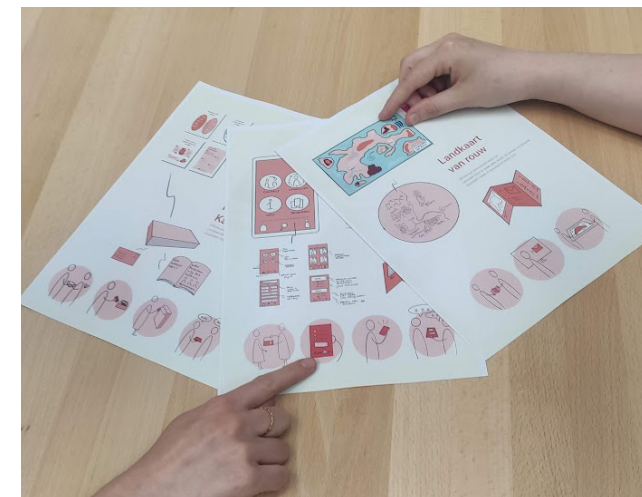


figure 23. Co-reflection sessions with experience experts



figure 24. Peer evaluation

5.2 Concepts

Concept 1: Praatkaarten

On the day of returning to school after experiencing parental loss, the teenager receives a box from their mentor. The box can be opened and the cards can be explored at the teenager's own pace, either at home or at school. The bereaved teenager can select a card that best resonates with their current emotional state or experiences. While there is an option to include a note on the card before delivery, it is not mandatory. The teenager can use the card to either provide an update or request an appointment with the desired teacher. The card can then be placed in a postbox at school that is specifically addressed to the desired teacher.

In case an appointment is requested, the card can be used to schedule a meeting with the teacher. During the meeting, the teacher brings the card along, providing a starting point for interaction between the teenager and the teacher.

Insights

During the co-reflection sessions several insights were gathered about the proposed concept. Participants indicated that the concept is appreciated because it offers a choice to use it or not.

"Je kan zelf makkelijk kiezen of je het doosje opent en wat je er mee doet."

- CR1, teenager 16y

Additionally, some participants felt too vulnerable to physically place the card in an open post-box, which highlights the importance of the location of the post box in school, ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for expressing grief and getting in contact.

"Het is fijn dat je het niet gelijk aan de docent hoeft te geven."

- CR1, teenager 15y

"De brievenbus moet niet te openbaar zijn, want dan weten andere van jou dat je het in de brievenbus stopt. Ze zullen dan wel benieuwd zijn."

- CR1, teenager 16y

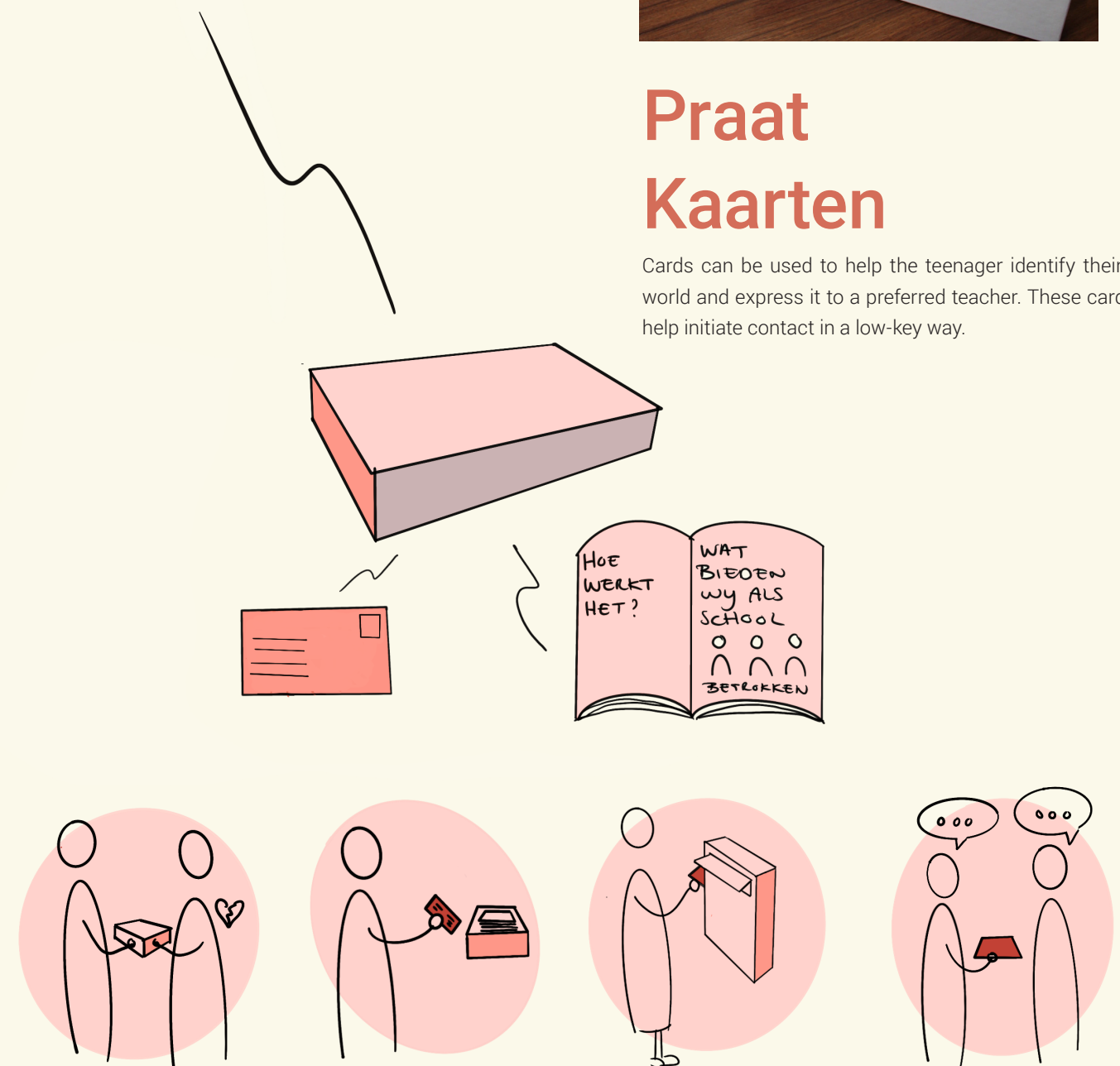
Regarding the cardset, participants appreciated the variety of cards that included emotions, desires, information, and exercises. They also proposed additional cards, such as 'what if I can't cope anymore', 'I feel stressed about exams and can't handle it right now', and 'I'm worried about finances.' Participants also suggested creating different cardsets depending on when the loss occurred, such as a box for anticipating grief, returning to school, and a card set for a longer period of time. The cardset can be supplemented to the received box over time.

The participants suggested the option to just inform the teacher or to indicate wanting an appointment. This provides a safe way to communicate without necessarily having to talk about the loss.



Praat Kaarten

Cards can be used to help the teenager identify their inner world and express it to a preferred teacher. These cards can help initiate contact in a low-key way.



Concept 2: Landkaart van Rouw

‘De landkaart van rouw’ is a visual map that represents various themes related to grief within and outside the school environment. It serves as a reflective tool that enables teenagers to identify and amongst others express their feelings and needs concerning social support within the school environment. The map is a conversation starter during the appointment with the natural helper. It can indicate how the teenager is coping with their grief.

Upon returning to the school environment after a loss, the teenager is provided with a folder that contains information about the “Landkaart van Rouw”. The folder includes a description of the map and instructions on how to make contact with the natural helpers. Contact details of the natural helpers are also provided, and the teenager can schedule an appointment via email. During the contact moment, the map can facilitate the conversation by providing a visual representation of the teenager’s experiences and needs, allowing them to move over the map.

Insights

The act of offering only a paper folder as the means of showing what kind of support school can offer is insufficient and lacks the appropriate level of gesture fitting the situation. The teacher’s initial invitation of support is essential in promoting contact in later stages. Therefore, it is crucial that the first handover includes a meaningful gesture from school.

“Het brengt overzicht in wat er allemaal speelt in je leven, en als leerling te horen krijgt waar je allemaal last van hebt normaal is.”

- CR1, teenager 15y

The current means of contacting a teacher by email might be too high. Coming up with an explanation for the appointment is mentioned as the reason for this. Next, during the appointment the process of identifying and expressing one’s feelings in the moment can be overwhelming, resulting in a lack of perceived autonomy. Many teenagers prefer to be prepared before the meeting to express their thoughts and feelings.

“Ik vind het een hoge drempel om zelf afspraak te maken.”

- CR1, teenager 15y

“Je hebt de druk van de docent die erbij zit.”

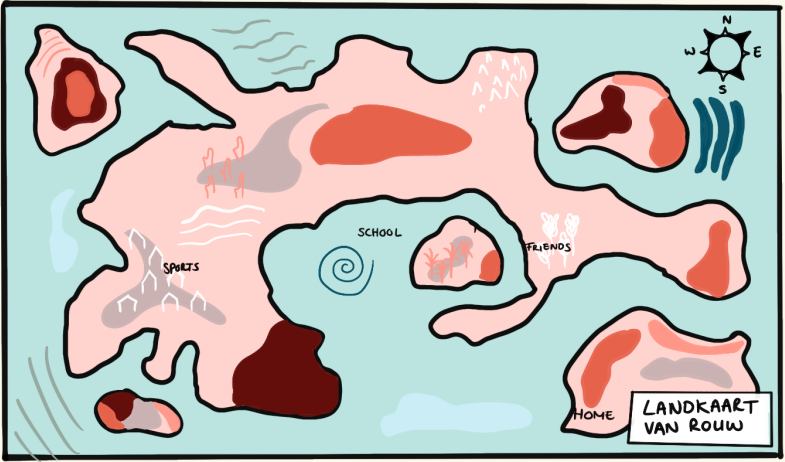
- CR1, teenager 16y

Some teenagers indicated that expressing oneself during an initial meeting with the approached natural helper might be challenging. However, the representation of feelings and experiences on the map are valued, many teenagers require additional guidance in identifying and expressing their feelings.

“Ik vind het te lastig.”

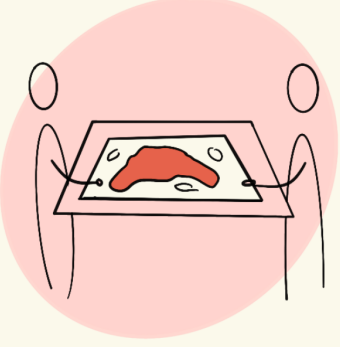
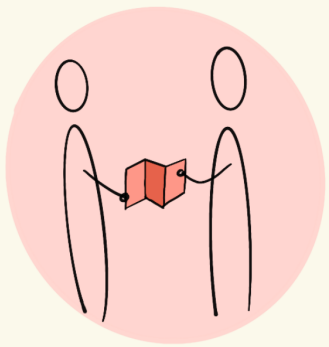
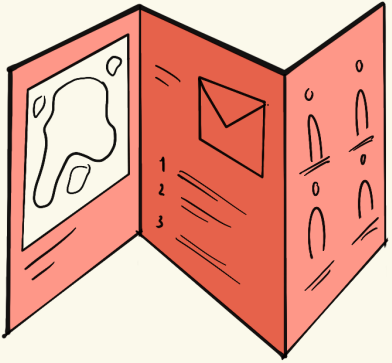
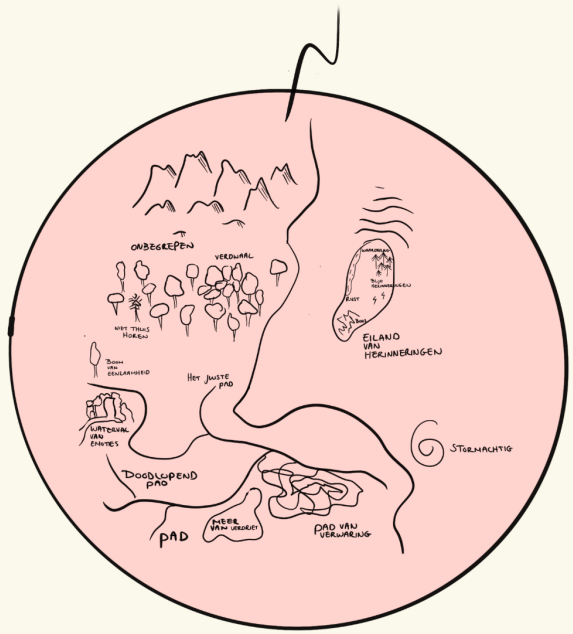
- CR1, teenager 16y

During the interviews came forward that the desired support is more than only talking. This concept is limited in variety of support, since it is mainly talking about feelings and experiences. The need for support may range from simply having a person present to listen, to receiving a form of distraction.



Landkaart van rouw

A visual overview of the emotions, experiences, and needs that may accompany grief can facilitate conversations between the teacher and teenager about the topic.



Concept 3: Connect

The third concept is an application, called Connect, designed to make it easier for teenagers to reach out to their teachers. The goal of Connect is to provide a reflective way for teenagers to reflect on their own experiences by accessing the experiences of teenagers with a similar loss experience. The application enables teenagers to seek contact with their preferred teacher and make appointments. The reflection on experiences of others can be a starting point for a conversation. Moreover, Connect can have a sight function that facilitates peer contact. The social worker can coordinate the peer contact, ensuring that it is safe and supportive.

The teenager will receive an information folder of the application Connect after returning to school after the parental loss. After downloading the app and creating an account, teenagers will be presented with experiences of other teenagers who have experienced parental loss. These experiences have been gathered from a national level to ensure safety of the individuals. Teenagers can scroll through these experiences and reflect on their own experiences, by ranking it. They are able to share them with the selected teacher if desired. Appointments can be made easily using the app, providing an efficient and accessible way for teenagers to get the support they need. During the contact with the teachers, the experiences in the application can be a starting point to talk about.

Insights

Connect is viewed by teenagers as a convenient way to contact their desired teacher. Teachers have found the combination of the application with an explanation folder useful, as it can be given to the student as an introduction to the product.

The application provides an interactive way for students to learn about a teacher's background. By sharing personal experiences through text, film, or audio, the teacher's profile is presented, making it easier for students to approach them. The personal touch of the natural helpers was highly appreciated by the participants.

"Het is fijn om te weten dat je niet de enige bent."

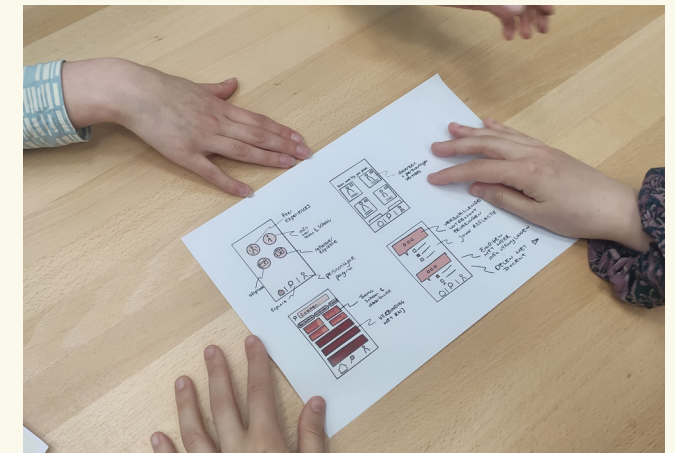
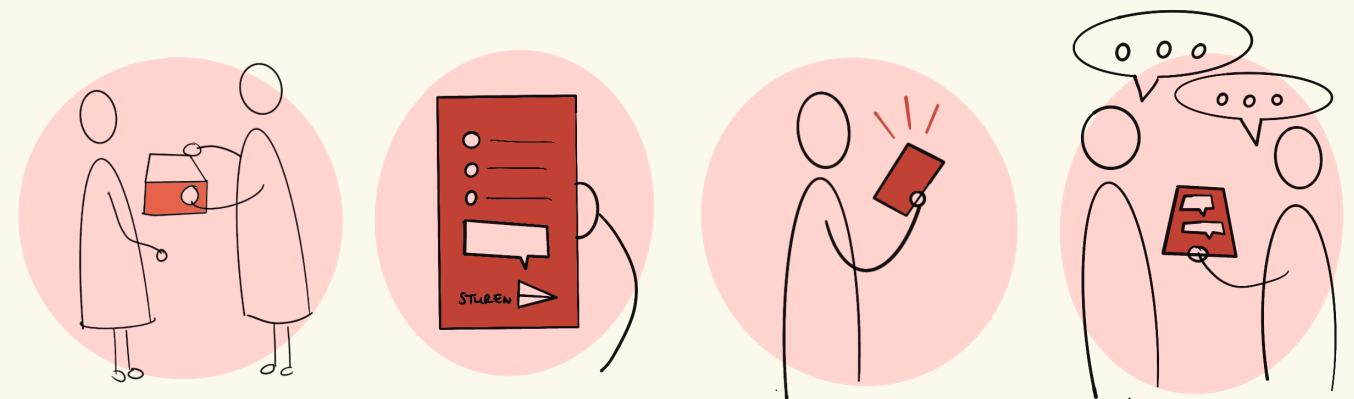
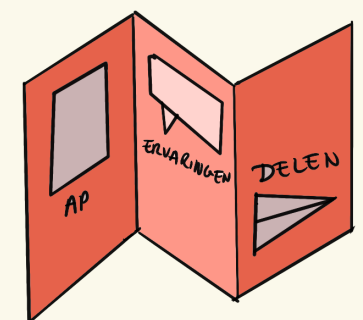
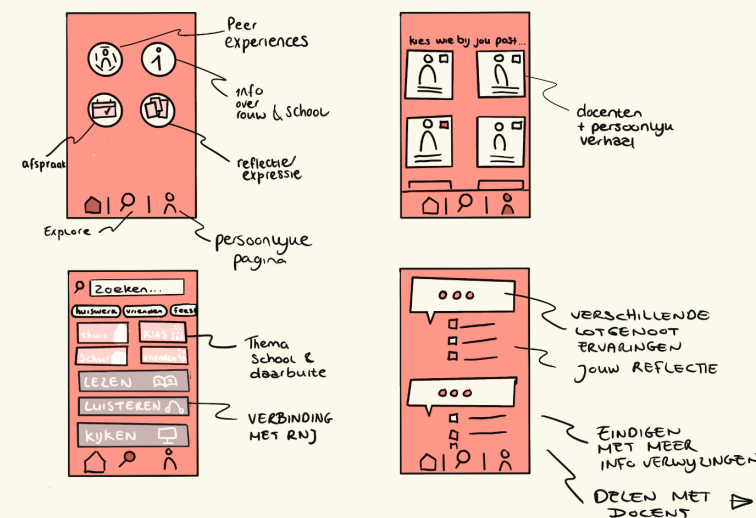
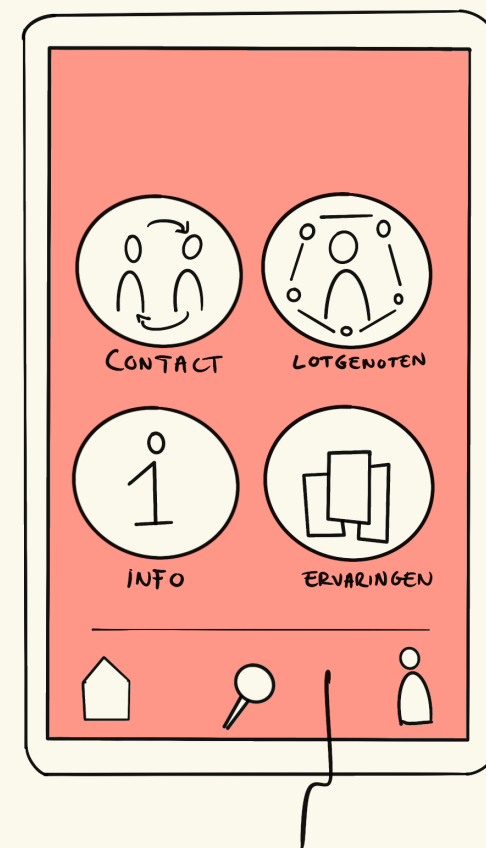
- CR1, teenager 16y

The implementation of experiences of experienced experts within Connect is viewed as something useful by the teenagers with parental loss. Additionally, several teenagers expressed the notion that the application could also serve as a useful tool for connecting with peers who have experienced a similar loss. To ensure safe and secure interaction, it was suggested to involve the school social worker in facilitating such contacts.

"Voelt veiliger als het anoniem zou zijn. Je wilt wel weten wat andere ervaren maar het is ook wel een stukje privacy dat je weggeeft."

- CR1, teenager 14y

However, it is important to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the application's functionalities and explore potential alternatives such as physical means. The digital competencies of teachers can also affect the success of the application, and the lack of digital skills may limit participation among bereaved teenagers. Integrating the application's features with existing platforms like Magister could increase its likelihood of success.



Application: Connect

The app can help the teenager with initiating contact with teachers in a low-key manner. It can also help to provide experiences of peers with likeminded loss experiences.

5.3

Key insights

Multiple research activities were conducted to explore the potential solution space, such as creative sessions, co-creation and co-refleciotion. The insights gathered were reduced to three concepts: Praatkaarten; Landkaart van Rouw; Application: Connect.

The concepts are evaluated with important stakeholders and experts. The design insights are summarised for each interaction quality:

xiv. **Safety**

Seeking online contact is experienced as easy. Not having any physical interaction to reach out to a teacher makes teenagers feel more comfortable and is considered safe. This aspect of digitally reaching out to a teacher was appreciated in the application Connect (concept 3).

xv. **Expression**

The design should assist teenagers in expressing themselves, and the cards included in De PraatKaart - which cover emotions, experiences, needs, and information - were experienced effectively in achieving this. However, due to its abstract representation, De landkaart van rouw was perceived to be too complex, requiring too much effort to identify feelings and needs. In the application, Connect, the experiences of others were experienced as helpful guidance.

xvi. **Autonomy**

Two significant moments are relevant for the target group - the freedom to initiate interaction and the ability to share what they desire. The card set and application were perceived to promote a high level of autonomy. Participants felt empowered to choose whether or not to utilize the product. The card set specifically offered a sense of independence in selecting what information to share. However, ‘De landkaart van Rouw’ was experienced to provide the least autonomy, as participants require to engage

in reflective self-expression during interactions with the teacher.

xvii. **Inviting**

The initial interaction with a teacher is crucial for adolescents who have experienced the loss of a parent and are returning to school. This first touchpoint in school after a parental loss can influence the likelihood of future engagement between the student and teacher staff. De Praatkaart - which includes a physical box and personalized message from the teacher staff - was perceived as the most inviting gesture from the teachers since it includes a physical product. The physical card box is also indicated by school staff as the product that fits the best within the school environment.

xviii. **Knowledge**

Regarding concept 2, ‘De landkaart van rouw’, teachers require more specialized knowledge to effectively engage with students. Digital tools were perceived as less accessible for teachers, whereas physical products were more cost-effective and aligned with the digital competencies of the school staff. It is essential to emphasize the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a mental health professional, as no therapeutic intervention is required in order to increase social support in the school environment.

xix. **Empathy**

The expressive nature of the different proposed concepts enables teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the world of adolescents who have experienced parental loss. Specifically, De Praatkaart, includes a wide range of emotion, experience, and need cards, providing teachers with insights into the complex and multi-dimensional nature of parental loss within the school environment. Besides the cards can provide teenagers with insights into the ability of their surroundings in offering support.

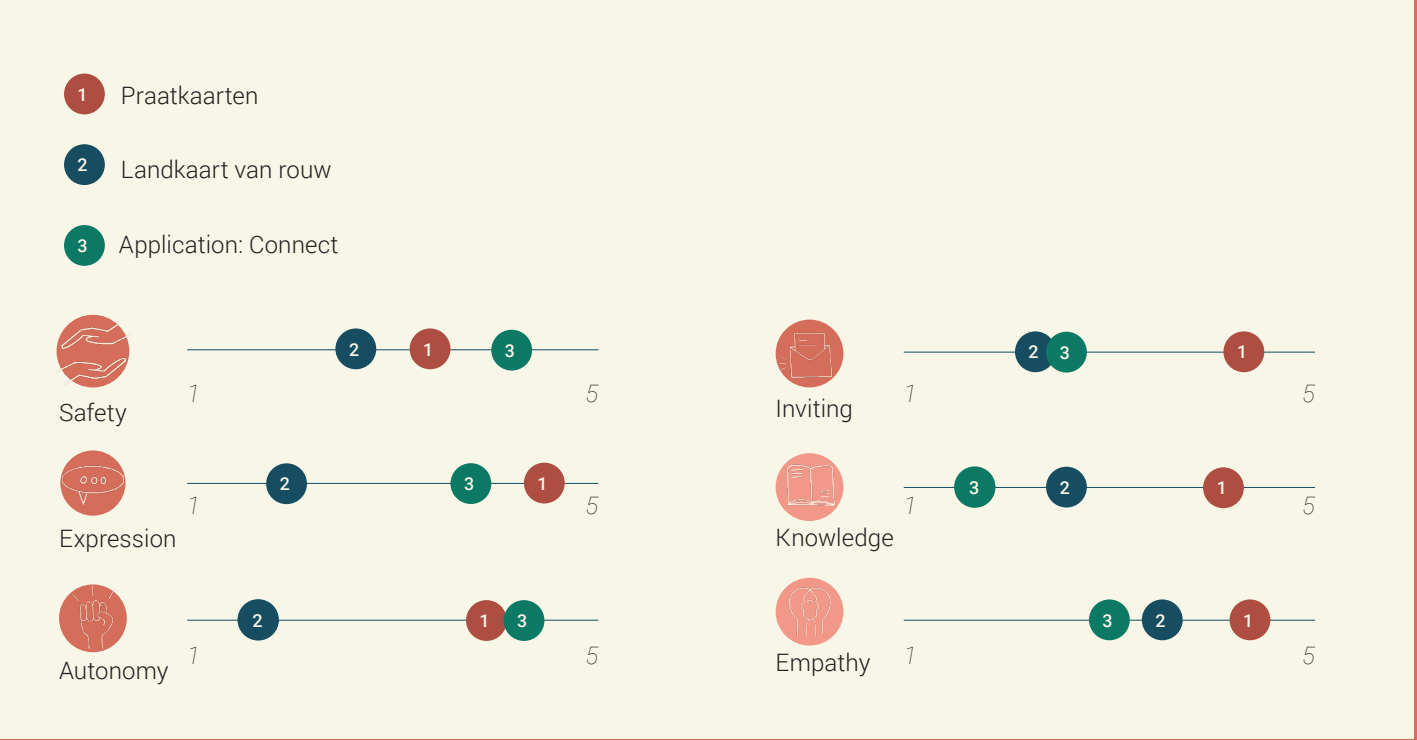
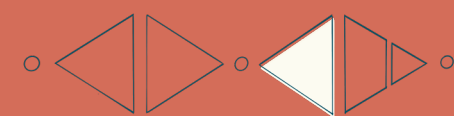


figure 25. Assessment of Interaction Qualities for the different concepts

Conclusion

Based on the creative and reflective sessions, multiple ideas were explored on how to provide school staff with means to offer bereaved teenagers possibilities for desired support in the school environment. The ideas were proposed to the target group. The interaction qualities were evaluated to see what elements of the idea fit the desired interaction. The integration of different elements from De Praatkaart and the application Connect (concepts 1 and 3) resulted in the final design.

The final design is presented in the following chapter.



6. Deliver

final design

Chapter 6 presents the final concept and describes the implementation in the secondary school environment. The chapter starts with introducing the concept *Handreiking Rouw* (6.1). A scenario is then presented to illustrate the interaction with the product (6.2). The key aspects of Handreiking and their relation to the research and design insights are described (6.3). Finally, the implementation of the product in the secondary school environment is outlined (6.4).

Chapter overview:

- 6.1 Introduction to Handreiking Rouw
- 6.2 User scenario
- 6.3 Key aspect
- 6.4 Implementation
- 6.5 Key insights

6.1

Introduction to Handreiking Rouw

Handreiking Rouw

Handreiking Rouw is a **card set** designed for teenagers with parental loss. The card set offers possibilities for receiving the desired support within the secondary school environment. Handreiking Rouw is a comprehensive set of cards that allows teenagers to **identify and express their feeling, needs, and experiences** related to the loss of their loved one. In addition, it offers **suggestions** for social support and information both within and outside the school environment.

The card set also equips the school staff with **guidance in supporting** a teenager with parental loss. The cards provide school staff with knowledge and aims to increase empathy concerning the loss of a parent.

Introducing this tool provides all teenagers with parental loss with the **same possibilities for receiving desired social support** in school. It eliminates the chance of relying on just the teacher you face. Due to the card set these teenagers can easily **connect** with school staff who are open to and comfortable with offering support.

Below, the design is highlighted using the key aspects of the design goal:

The design goal is to create a

mental safe zone

for students and teachers to have

repeated exchanges about grief to

provide the desired support

for the bereaved student in

secondary education.

a. mental safe zone

The provision of the Handreiking box signals a message that there is **space** in the school environment for feelings of grief. Furthermore, it offers **low-key opportunities to connect** with the school personnel that feel comfortable with by providing support. In addition to the physical cards, digital mediums also enable the teenager to initiate contact.

b. repeated exchange

The range of cards provide **opportunities to communicate and discuss** a variety of feelings, experiences, and needs that may arise after the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, having the option to reach out to school personnel who are willing to engage in discussions about sensitive topics can lead to positive interactions and even further follow-ups.

c. desired support

The card set provides an **inviting** option for contacting school staff without imposing any obligation to use the cards. If the need arises, individuals can readily access the card set for support. The range of cards offers suggestions for the **many ways support** can be given, from expressing how you feel to having a conversation.



6.2

User scenario

The following pages describe the scenario of the usage of the 'handreiking'. The scenario illustrates how the different stakeholders are involved within this initiative.

The following stakeholders are involved:

- a. Laura. Teenager with parental loss
- b. Robert. The mentor
- c. Frans: The natural helper
- d. Kirsten: the school social worker



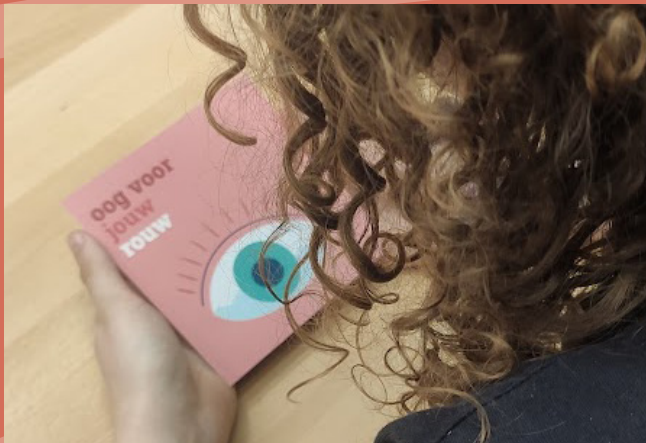
1. The passing of Laura's father

Laura's dad dies after a sickbed of 8 months. The funeral has been two weeks ago. Her mentor Robert was present, with the head of the department from Havo and some of her close friends attended the funeral.



2. Robert collects the mentor guide

After the unfortunate news reaches school, the mentor (Robert) approach the school social worker to discuss the steps that need to be taken. The school social worker, Kirsten, makes the mentor aware of handreiking and the mentor guide that comes along with the initiative. Robert reads the guide for mentors.



3. The letter from school

Robert and Kirsten prepare the post card for Laura. The letter is sent from the school with the names of all the teachers. On the card, the condolences are made, and handreiking is introduced for the first time. It describes the possibility to pick up the Handreiking box on the first day of her return to school.



4. Laura's return to school

Today Laura will return to school for the first time since her father died. This week her mother had contact with her mentor about her return. Robert asked her to be a bit earlier before her first class, biology, starts and to stop by his room.



5. Hand over handreiking box

Laura meets her mentor in the classroom. They talk about the funeral and her experiences of the past two weeks. During their contact, Robert hands over the card box.



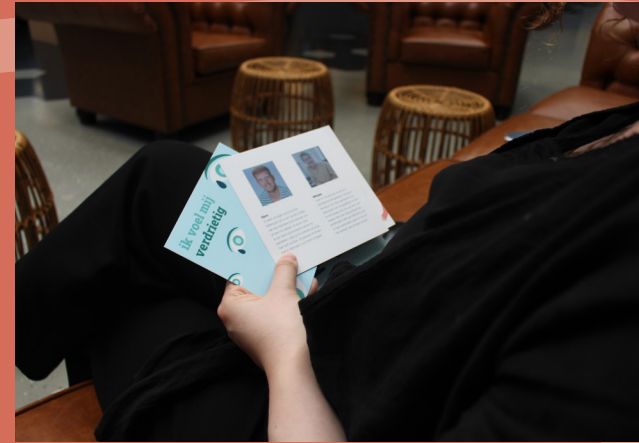
6. Introducing the box

By using the manual the box contains, Robert explains the possibilities the box may offer to Laura. He emphasises that the use of it is totally optional, and should only be done when she feels comfortable to do so. After a while the bell rings and Laura has to head to her first class.



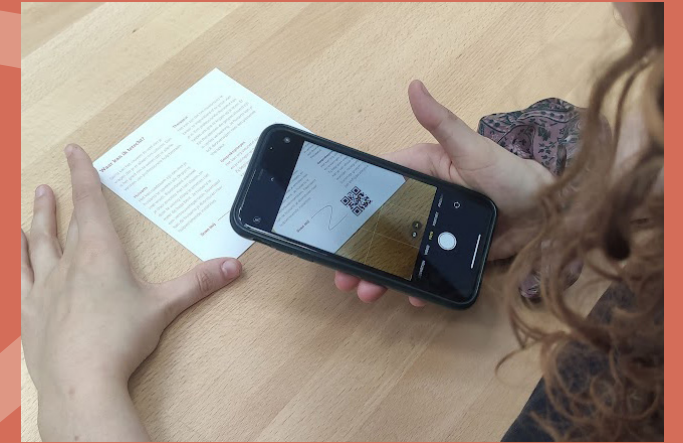
7. Laura browses through the cards

Laura returns home and places the box on her desk. Together with her mother, she opens it to browse through the different cards. They start by reading the introduction and scanning the names of the teachers that are involved. Afterwards, they put the box away.
Options: Laura can browse individually through the cards at home; together with her parent; at school, for example with the help of the school social worker.



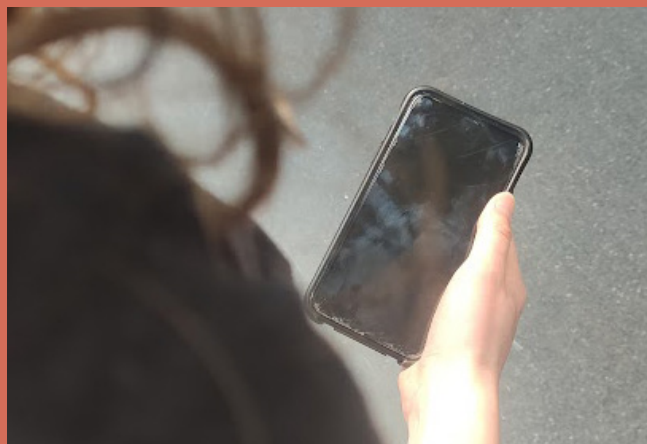
8. Pick a card

Six weeks later, Laura finds it difficult to focus during class and gets easily distracted. She has a history test coming up next week but feels she has no mental space to prepare for it. Feeling overwhelmed, Laura decides to confide in someone at school and opens the box to look through the cards. As she goes through them, she comes across one that speaks to her current emotional state. Curious, she flips the card over to read more about the topic.
Options: just read the front; dive deeper into the topic and read more information on the back.



9. Scan QR-code to make an appointment

She uses her smartphone to scan the QR code on the back of the card, which directs her to a website. Laura selects a suitable time and chooses Frans, her friendly gymnastics instructor, to invite for a chat. She adds a short description about how stressed she is about the upcoming history test before sending the invitation.
Options: Possibilities to physically hand over the card to the natural helper; only give some heads up by leaving a message on the webpage; plan an appointment.



10. Natural helper receives an invite

The appointment is confirmed and Frans receives an invitation via email. After reading Laura's message, he picks up the Handreiking box from the school social worker's office and looks through the card Laura mentioned. The text on the back provides more information about how grief can affect concentration.



11. Contact moment

Laura meets Frans, her gymnastics instructor, on Friday after school. She has brought the card and briefly discuss that she would prefer to go for a walk.



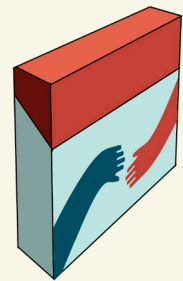
12. Walk and talk

Laura and Frans go for a walk and they discuss the topic mentioned on the card. Laura shares her experience of being unable to concentrate on the test and how she has been struggling with it for the past few days. Frans listens and offers some suggestions. They both decide that instead of taking the test, Laura can work on her art assignment in the school's art studio. Frans also suggests giving a heads up to Laura's history teacher about this arrangement. Laura feels relieved, and they return to school.

6.3 Key aspects

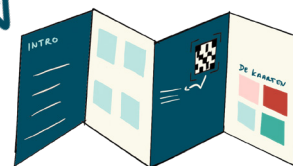
In this paragraph, the key aspects of *Handreiking Rouw* are further explained. Furthermore, the design aspects are linked to research and design insights as described in the earlier chapters. These are indicated with roman numerals.

The Handreiking box, together with the teacher's card, the webpage, the mentor guide and the natural helpers session will be described in more detail on the following pages.



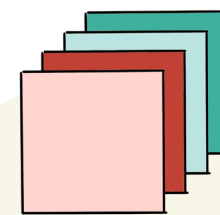
The handreiking box

The Handreiking box, which contains the cards, has a refined appearance. An appealing product is required to foster a sense of acknowledgment from the teachers' team (iv). It has a simple layout, with only the name and an abstract illustration on the outside. The box's discreet design on the outside is favoured by bereaved teenagers who want to avoid bringing attention to their differences and prevent questions from peers about the content of the box (xiv). The opening mechanism of the box allows the user to have an overview of the contents within.



The manual

The manual offers a clear explanation of the card set, including usage instructions and a list of school staff associated with the initiative. Its purpose is to provide both the bereaved teenagers and school staff with information to make use of the cards (ix; x; xii).



The themes

The cards in the box are arranged in the following themes: Feelings, needs, experiences, and suggestions. All of the cards in the box were created through collaborative sessions with the target group and experts that includes participant interviews and brainstorming sessions. 'The feelings and needs' cards are designed to engage in reflection and support expression for the bereaved teenager (xv). 'The experience' cards show quotes of others who experienced parental loss in order to show relatable experiences (iii). The suggestion' cards include information about resources for help both inside and outside the school environment.



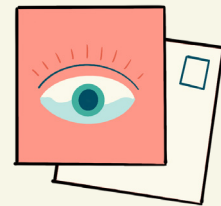
Cards

I. Front

A statement is presented on the card's front, and it is supported by illustrations. The statements are written in the first person form, such as "I feel ...", to trigger reflection. The message on the card is further supported by a graphic. The card's abstract graphic leaves room for the individuals' perception.

II. Back

The user is able to delve deeper into the content (iii) by exploring the back of the card. This includes a question to initiate the reflection, and includes more details concerning the topic of the card.



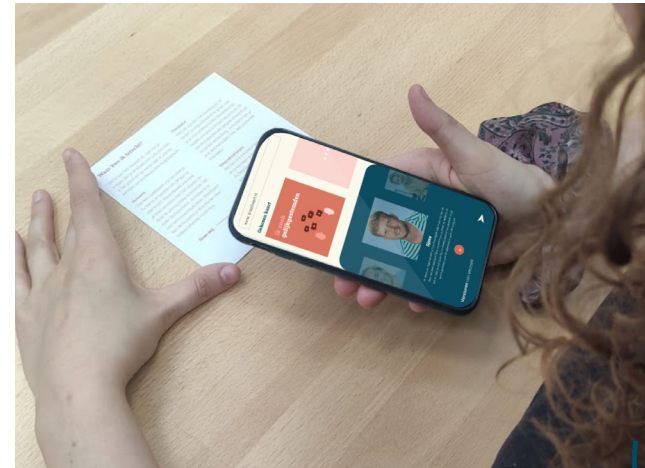
Oog voor jouw rouw card

The card is designed to express condolences from the teacher's team and to make the teenager aware of the Handreiking box (iv). Each teacher has the opportunity to include their name and a brief note on the card. The card helps to ensure that the teenager is aware of the support opportunities available within the school.



Mentor guide

The mentor's guide provides support for mentors to hand over the card box to bereaved teenagers. If a student faces parental loss, this information is provided to the mentor by the school social worker (x). The manual is divided in several sections, including an introduction to *Handreiking Rouw*, information about the impact of parental loss, the support options inside and outside the school environment, and three example stories of teenagers that face parental loss to foster an empathic understanding (xiii).



Webpage

The QR code on the card directs the user to the webpage. The website has a clear and simple layout. The chosen card will be shown on the webpage. However, the user is still able to select a different card. The teenager also has the choice to select their preferred teacher, suggest a time, and there is space to add a message. The webpage allows teenagers to reach out to teachers in a low-key manner, without having to face them (xiv).

6.4 Implementation

Self Determination Theory

The school staff’s engagement and support within this initiative is crucial for the design’s successful integration into the school environment. To ensure a successful implementation of the Handreiking, the self-determination theory is used as the foundation for determining the implementation focus. The self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) offers an approach to understand human motivation and personality in a social context. The theory suggests that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential factors in fostering high-quality and intrinsic **motivation**.

These essential psychological needs, **autonomy**, **competence**, and **relatedness**, are an inspiration for a successful implementation of the product. For each basic psychological need, a point of action is linked:

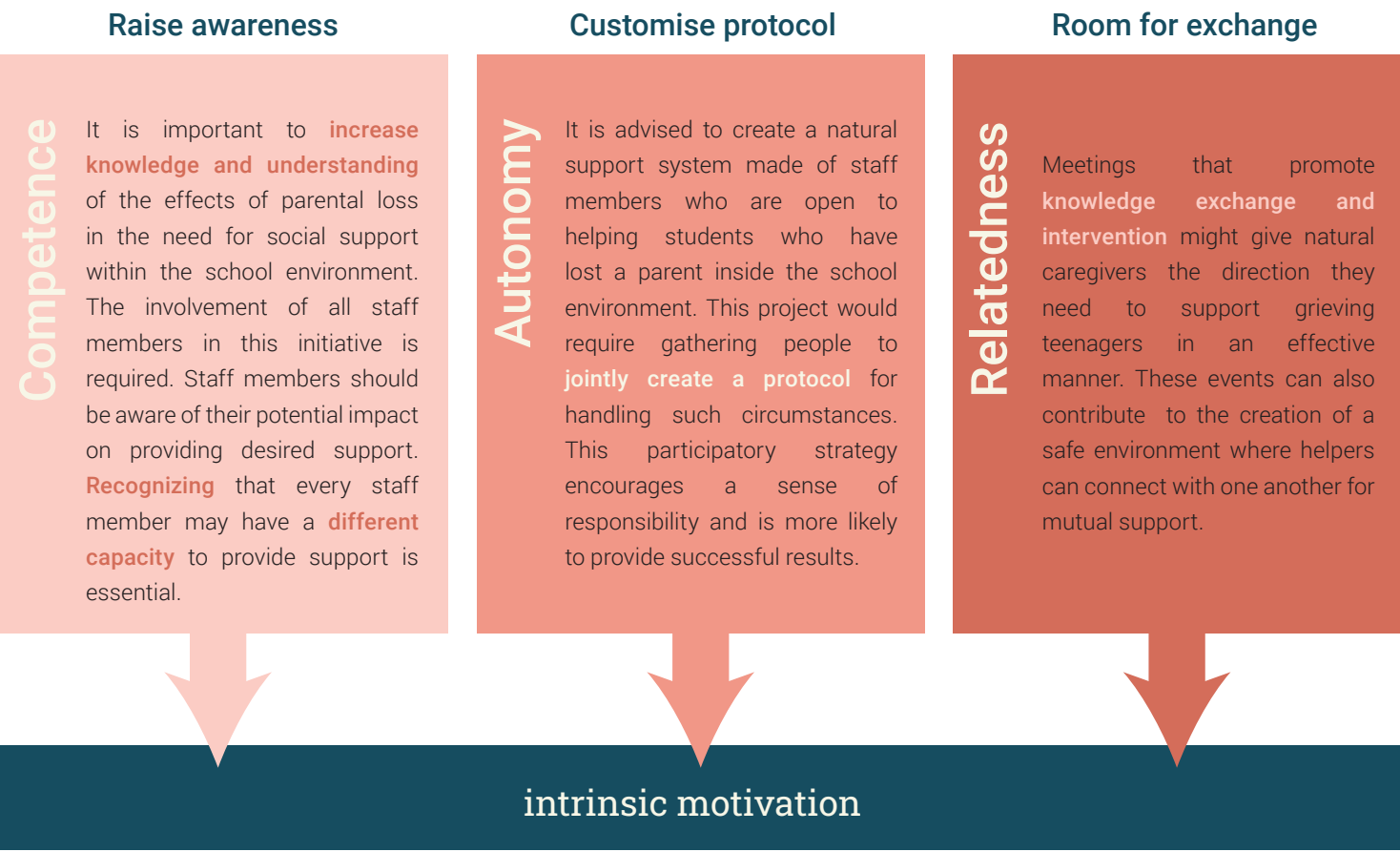


figure 26. implementation based on the self-determination theory

Collaboration with health organisations

The success of implementing Handreiking largely depends on collaborating with reliable organizations that are known for promoting (mental) health and increasing the prevention of mental health issues, such as the Humanitas, GGD and Prezens. These organisations are already focussing on (mental) health and have an interest in low-cost options that they can offer to schools.

To begin implementing the Handreiking, schools can start with a few boxes and gradually expand their offer if it is well received. At the start, the health and welfare organisations can be involved with creating awareness in school, customise the protocol and facilitate exchange between the natural helpers. Over time, a school-based ambassador can be established to raise awareness even further.

“Dit zou een aanvulling zijn op het huidige GGD aanbod.”

- Coordinator VTO-vroeghulp at GGD Zaanstreek

“Dit past binnen Humanitas, ook de visuele stijl. Het is een verrijkend aanbod voor scholen.”

- Coordinator Jongeren in Rouw at Humanitas

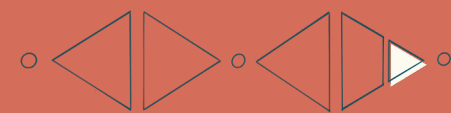
6.4

Key insights

Conclusion

This chapter presented *Handreiking Rouw*, a card set designed for teenagers who have experienced parental loss, to offer desired support within the secondary school environment. The cards enable bereaved teenagers to identify and express their feelings, needs, and experiences related to the loss of their loved one, while also offering suggestions for social support and resources both within and outside of school. Additionally, the card set equips school staff with knowledge and empathy, ensuring that every teenager with parental loss receives the same opportunities for support and connection with staff who are open and comfortable in offering help.

The concept *Handreiking rouw* will be evaluated in the following chapter.



7. Evaluation

the concept

The design Handreiking Rouw has been evaluated with experience experts, teachers, and experts. In 7.1 the approach of the evaluation is explained. 7.2 outlines the key insights of obtained from the evaluation.

Chapter overview:

7.1 Approach

7.2 Results

7.1 Approach

The goal

The evaluation sessions were conducted to eliminate any designer assumptions made during the design process. Additionally, to understand what kind of future developments are necessary to improve the perceived social support in the school environment.

The design is evaluated by important stakeholders, including teachers, school social workers, experience experts and experts from organisations focused on mental health. *Handreiking Rouw* is explored using the physical prototype presented in chapter 6. The interview was divided into three phases: the first impression, interaction qualities and implementation.

First impression

During the first phase, the participants explored the design themselves and provided their initial reactions. The effect and interaction with the design were then evaluated.

Interaction qualities

The vision of this project is to ensure that all students have an equal chance to receive desired social support over time from both their teachers and peers after experiencing a parental loss. The interaction qualities give direction in what qualities the design should include in order to evoke this repeated exchange and offering and receiving the desired support. During the evaluation sessions each interaction quality is discussed.

Implementation

The interviews concluded with questions concerning the implementation of the design. During this project a first version of the *Handreiking Rouw* toolkit was developed. The evaluation aimed to get insights in future development to reach the desired goal of enhancing social support in the secondary school environment.

Research questions

The following research questions are addressed:

- Does the design have the desired effect?
- Is the in general interaction with the product and the interaction it evokes with other involved individuals well-understood and preferred by the involved stakeholders?
- To what extent does the design evoke the interaction qualities?
- What specific aspects of the design need to be further researched in order to improve its success?
- What are the next steps to further the design into something that can enhance social support in the secondary school environment?
- What steps need to be taken to implement the design intervention in the school environment?

figure 27. Photos of evaluation of the concept



7.2

Key insights

General: The effect

- I. The act of handing over the box would have been **appreciated** form of interaction, following the experience experts (Evl5, 2023). The card from the teacher's team together with the physical card box would result in a feeling of **being seen** and a feeling of **acknowledgment** of the loss.
- II. The box in school will offer school staff more **guidance** in offering each teenager the same possibilities for support after a parental loss (Evl4, 2023). Working with the Handreiking box would have the potential to result in a more **consistent** and **uniform approach** for the return of each teenager after a parental loss.

"Ik had zo een box wel willen hebben. Dit had mij heel veel kunnen bieden toen ik die leeftijd was. Ik had me vereerd gevoeld om zo een box te mogen ontvangen."

– evl3, experience expert

The interaction

- III. The outside of the box does not offer any information about its content or instruction on how to use it. It only consists of the name of the product. The lack of information is perceived as **pleasant** since it is **discrete** about the box content (evl5, 2023), which makes teenagers less vulnerable to collecting or using the box since they prefer not to be treated differently. However, the lack of information on the outside can also result in **confusion** and **uncertainty** when using the box (evl4, 2023). Adding some text or graphics on the outside can also guide the user to use the Handreiking box as they desire.
- IV. The **navigation through the cards is well understood** because of the use colour coding, the navigation tabs between the cards, and the text (evl1-evl5, 2023).

"De thematiek werkt goed. in een oogopslag is te zien wat voor kaarten er in de box zitten"

– evl3, experience expert.

Interaction qualities

For both teacher as for the bereaved teenager, does *Handreiking Rouw* evoke the following qualities?



Safety

- V. Stakeholders believe the physical form evokes a **meaningful interaction** of handing the card box to the bereaved teenager. Teachers feel **more prepared** to welcome a teenager after parental loss (Evl4, 2023).
- V. Regardless of whether they decide to use the Handreiking box, teenagers may perceive gesture as **support and recognition** (Evl5, 2023). The teenager receives leads to reach out within and outside the school environment. The **topic of grief is normalised** by offering the box. The safe environment can easily be initiated by the teenager, by reaching out to one of the natural helpers.

"Alleen al door het doosje voel je je gezien"

– evl5, experience expert



Expression

- VII. The box consists of a variety of cards that can **fit the expressive needs** of a teenager. The content is rich and includes the various experiences, feelings, and needs of many bereaved teenagers (evl2; evl4; evl5, 2023).
- VIII. The card can be a **conversation starter** during the appointment with the natural helper. The cards can offer the natural helper also **guidance** within the conversation, or they can go together through the cards to identify feelings, experiences and needs (evl4, 2023).



Autonomy

- IX. The box will facilitate possibilities for **low-key interaction** between school staff and bereaved teenagers, in a way both parties feel comfortable with (Evl4; Evl5, 2023). The teacher will only be approached if they feel comfortable with this. And the teenager has a choice with who the interaction will take place.
- X. The teenager feel the possibility to have **the freedom** make use of the box in the extend that fits their needs. Besides, they have possibilities to make use of the concept either express themselves online or physically.

“Je kan zelf makkelijk kiezen of je het doosje opent en wat je er mee doet.”

– evl5, experience expert

“De kaartset is uitnodigend zonder dat het dwingend is.”

– evl4, teacher



Invite

- XI. The design's physical form, in combination with the webpage, fits the school environment (evl1-evl5, 2023). It is **easy to use, compact, and doesn't require any prior knowledge**. It is inviting for teachers to participate .
- XII. The graphical style is experienced as **appealing**. The graphics support the text on the cards and makes the cards more intuitive to use. The appearance is experienced as neutral, not steering the user in any direction (evl1-evl5, 2023).

“Het ziet er toegankelijk uit voor zowel de tiener als voor de docent ”

– evl1, expert



Understanding

- XIII. The card box can **enhance the understanding** of the school staff, empowering mentors and natural helpers in their interaction with the bereaved teenagers (elv4, 2023).
- XIV. The background of the cards provides the user with more information, and is experienced as offering a **deeper understanding** (evl4; evl5, 2023). Teenagers and school staff can decide for themselves how much depth they want to go into the information the card set includes.
- XV. The mentor guide can be **more inclusive in the information** that a mentor should know in order to hand over the box (evl1; evl2; evl4, 2023). More information on what exactly to write on the card for example. Also more guidance in how to explain the box. For example, the introduction within the box can be a guidance in this.

“Als docent ben je er niet ervaren in om support te bieden, omdat het niet vaak gebeurt. Je wilt dan toch even iets doornemen alvorens je met de tiener in contact komt.”

– evl4, teacher



Empathy

- XVI. The texts on the cards provide insights into emotions, behaviour and experiences that teenagers may encounter after the loss of a loved one. Especially the experience cards, which include quotes from experience experts, provide the reader with an **empathic understanding** (evl4, 2023). The graphic on the cards emphasizes this, by a visual representation (evl4, 2023).
- XVI. Some cards in the Handreiking box provide the bereaved teenager with a more empathic understanding regarding the, sometimes harmful, **actions of their surroundings**. The introduction does **emphasize** the importance of interacting with people in the school community that fit you feel comfortable with. Nevertheless, this be further elaborated in the cards (evl5, 2023).

Implementation

The concept can have the biggest chance of success when it will be spread by organisations that are already involved in the schools with improving and protecting (mental) health, like GGD or Humanitas. *Handreiking Rouw* can be a **suitable addition to current offer of Humanitas and GGD** (evl1; evl2, 2023). Using existing linkage, like Gezondheidbevorderaars GGD, to implement the tool in school.

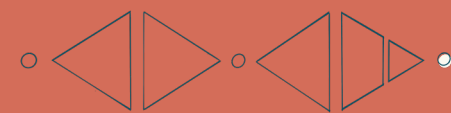
XVII. However the **costs** of the current concept are **too high** to make it affordable for the organisations (evl1; evl2, 2023). A redesign has to be made to create a version that is lower in costs to implement in the school environment.

XVIII. Creating ownership within the school community to initiate the community, to create awareness and really use the product (evl1, 2023). The organisations can play an important role in the first stage of implementing the toolbox, however, **intrinsic motivation** should be created to implement it on the long run.

The evaluations gave insights in whether the design aligned with the intended goal. Based on the evaluations, the conclusions and recommendations are developed and presented in the following chapter.

“Dit is een verrijkend aanbod voor scholen”

– evl1, expert Humanitas



8. Discussion

This chapter concludes the research and design chapters with conclusions of the project and stresses the importance of this research (8.1). The limitations of the project are highlighted (8.2). Finally, recommendations for future development are made (8.3).

Chapter overview:
8.1 Conclusion
8.2 Limitations
8.3 Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

Research outcomes

The graduation project aimed to explore social support within the school environment after parental loss. Through many research activities, e.g. context mapping interviews with the stakeholders, expert interviews, and literature study the current state of social support is analysed after parental loss. The research identifies many factors influencing the perceived support either positively or negatively from the school staff or peers. Teenagers often rely on chance encounters with individuals within the educational system, such as mentors, teachers, or peers, whether their desired social support needs will be met (chapter 2).

A social support journey was made to create an overview over time of the experiences and needs of both bereaved teenagers and teachers over time. This overview provided opportunities for the improving social support (chapter 3).

Design outcomes

The research has identified multiple design opportunities to enhance social support in the school environment (chapter 4). The primary focus of the design is to enable people within the community to offer support by enhancing social support networks through the use of community health workers. This involves facilitating opportunities for bereaved teenagers to easily connect within school with preferred school staff, mentioned as the natural helpers. The natural helper has thereby their own support from community health workers within the school empowering them to offer support.

Possibilities of maintaining the same social support opportunities were explored by co-creating and co-reflecting

with involved stakeholders and experts (chapter 5). As an outcome of this process, a card set called *Handreiking Rouw* was developed (chapter 6). The box, provided to the teenager by the school following the loss of a parent, contains a variety of cards including feelings, needs, experiences, and suggestions. The Handreiking makes it easier for bereaved teenagers to communicate with individuals from the school staff by providing them with low-key options to get in touch with particular staff members. The toolkit also provides schools with a consistent approach to supporting bereaved teenagers. This involves providing mentors with instructions on how to welcome these teenagers, enabling teachers to have an empathic understanding of parental loss, and establishing a support network within the school for natural helpers that enables them to provide support to bereaved teenagers.

The evaluation (chapter 7) with the stakeholders and experts with different backgrounds showed the potential of the design for enhancing social support within the school environment. Furthermore, the evaluation resulted in recommendations for future developments of the design.

Design goal

The evaluation of the concept primarily focussed on the first impression of the design from stakeholders and experts with various backgrounds. The assessment of the interaction qualities gives an initial indication of whether the design is likely to fulfill the stated design goal.

The evaluation showed positive outcomes concerning the assessment of the interaction qualities from individuals who have experienced parental loss as well as school staff.

However, more research is required to improve *Handreiking Rouw* and to make it implementable in the educational environment.

Compassionate education

With the current state of the mental health amongst teenagers it is crucial to provide school staff and students with skills to deal with issues within and outside the classroom. Compassionate education, which focuses on providing teachers and students with emotional coping skills and promoting prosocial behaviour, is an initiative that is gaining ground in this area. However, promoting compassion and enhancing prosocial behaviour through compassion focussed programs remains a challenge.

Handreiking Rouw might empower schools with a tool to increase awareness of grief and provide a more universal

approach to a bereavement in schools. This card box is specified to strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the student. The design has the potential to promote compassion and enhance prosocial behaviour after the parental loss of a teenager.

Even though, grief followed by parental loss is the project's main focus, *Handreiking Rouw* can offer benefits beyond this specific type of grief. For example the grief followed by the loss of a sibling, family member or friend. Participants even mentioned the potential value of this design for other mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress.

Future vision

The aim of the design is to strengthen the bond between the student and teacher, and thereby enhancing social support. Additionally, the design seeks to promote the dialogue among the school staff about grief and mental health in general.

The thesis provides an example of how to make room for grief and set up universal opportunities for social support in the secondary school environment. The ultimate goal is to encourage a more compassionate and supportive school environment that values cognitive development as much as emotional development.

8.2 Limitations

While conducting this study, certain limitations were encountered that could have affected the project's results. This section explains these limitations.

Participants

The lack of ethnic diversity among the participants is one of the study's limitations. Although multiple participants were involved in the research, the sample did not cover the ethnical diversity of the population within the Netherlands. Also, the variety of religious backgrounds is not covered in this study, since most of the participants were connected to public schools.

Teenagers with parental loss

Although there was a variety (in age, education level, and gender) of grieving teenagers who participated in the study, it should be noted that a high percentage was part of support groups. This suggests that they already opened up for support and information about their loss. Differences may be between bereaved teenagers who have not sought out such support.

Experience experts

The experience experts were adults in their twenties who had lost a parent while they were in secondary school. Due to their own or their siblings' negative experiences, many of them actively participated in the study because they understood the value of increasing social support. They are more likely to participate since they see the value of a design based on their personal experience with the topic.

Teachers

The majority of the teachers who participated in this research educate students in havo/vwo tracks. Furthermore, most of the teachers recognised the importance of improving social support within the school context. However, not all teachers share the same viewpoint on the responsibility of the school organization on improving mental health.

The timeframe of the project

Due to the limited time frame of the project, there is no data available on the design's long-term effects. In order to evaluate the design, prototypes and usage scenarios are presented to the participants during the product evaluation process. Yet, it is still unclear whether the product can provide social support over a longer period of time, as desired by bereaved teenagers.

Qualitative research

Although conducting qualitative research fosters greater empathy for the target group and serves as a significant source of creative inspiration, the findings may not necessarily be statistically representative.

8.3 Recommendations

The final design, *Handreiking Rouw*, went through an initial evaluation. In order to turn the concept into a usable product and determine the long-term effects, more research is required. The recommendations are divided into three categories: the design, future research and implementation.

Design recommendations

Interaction recommendations

Many adjustments can be made to make the card box more user-friendly:

- Initially, the card box's back should explain what it is and what it can offer the user. By providing this information the user can better understand the possibilities of the box and the variety of content it contains.
- Secondly, exploring the card set by yourself can be experienced as overwhelming. A mentor or teacher can go through the cards together with the teenager. The mentor/teacher can introduce the card box with the help of the manual within the box. A teenager can also bring a parent to have the introduction together. A comprehensive and clear manual is needed in order to clearly describe Handreikings possibilities. It should also be made clear that using the card box is optional and not required.
- Thirdly, a bigger card box can make it easier to browse the cards.

Keep the content up to date and adjustable

- It is important to ensure the content is applicable to all schools within the Netherlands. Also provide information on the cards that remains up to date over the years.
- In order to secure the card set's successful implementation and ongoing use, it will be crucial to make sure that school staff members experience a feeling of ownership and engagement in it. Offering customizable options, such as enabling schools to add their own custom cards or content to the set, is one way to accomplish this. To establish the best methods for supporting this process of ownership, more research will be required.

Specific adjustments: cards

In addition to the earlier recommendations, some smaller adjustments can be made to the developed cards.

- The 'Over mijn verlies' cards can be folded to maintain privacy. The title can be changed to 'Ik' to not make it that obvious what is inside. With these adjustments, teenagers might feel safer to make use of the card. Next, a tear-off calendar based on this card can be created, allowing the student to share information about their loss and support preferences with multiple teachers, not just one.
- The 'Ik zie je' card can be created double-sided to accommodate all the teachers names.
- Adding cards that explain more about grief and loss, such as stressing that there is no right or wrong way to grief.
- Numbering the cards in the set is one way for determining which cards need to be updated or reordered for schools.

Mentor guide

The mentor guide should be further co-created with teachers to make sure it consists of the right information.

Webpage

Focus should be on developing a webpage that accompanies the card set. This webpage will be an addition in providing teenagers low-key possibilities to reach out to school staff.

Making sure the website is safe and connected to relevant platforms, such as Magister, is one factor to take into account when designing the website. This can make sure that users can easily access and that it is up to date. It is important to keep the step simple, to avoid teenagers quitting.

Natural helpers sessions

A natural helper session should be designed and tested in collaboration with stakeholders, such as teachers and school social workers. The session should consist of multiple steps aimed at developing a universal approach for handling parental grief using the *Handreiking rouw* toolkit.

Future research

Future testing

- It will be crucial to conduct tests in collaboration with important stakeholders. This includes the bereaved teenagers themselves, the mentor, and natural helpers. This will make sure the card set is effective in enhancing social support. The test should focus on the interaction between the teacher and the bereaved teenager when handing over the cardbox. Additionally, it should evaluate whether the teenager initiating contact with the tool is desirable. Furthermore, the content of the card set should be evaluated.
- It will be crucial to test the idea in its completeness, including the use of the filled-out cards and the webpage, in order to assess the effectiveness of the card set completely. This can offer insightful information about how the cards are really being used, and it can also guide future revisions of the card set to make sure it continues to meet the needs of bereaved teenagers and school staff.
- Further research is required to better understand the establishment of the natural helpers community. More insights should be gained in how this works and what kind of support is needed to empower the natural helpers in providing support. Additionally, in what extend is the school social worker able to facilitate this, and should external organisations be involved in this.

Diverse team

The cards should be further developed. From this research, different cards were derived. However, the content should be further developed, to make it fit this sensitive topic. Focussing on the textual, informational and graphic aspects of the cards. This should be done in collaboration with specialists from many fields of expertise, including psychology, education, language and graphic designer. The cards should go through many iterations, by developing, reviewing and proposing to bereaved teenagers and school staff.

It could be possible to create a website where schools can order extra cards as part of a package deal.

Implementation recommendations

It is crucial to think about how to make the card set affordable and time-effective for schools, as well as for health and welfare organisations. Here are some options described:

- Reducing the number of cards by combining some of them could be one way. The experience cards, for instance, can be combined with the needs or feelings cards. Also, the three categories of feelings cards can be divided in three categories: physical feelings, feelings of being different and emotions. The front of the cards will say "I feel..." with the options on the back.
- Allowing schools to print the cards themselves. However, this may compromise the refined appearance the cards currently have. This may also only apply for the manual within the card box, so the natural helpers can be easily customized for each school. The instructor manual can be included for example in a pre-made card, to make it fit the product.
- Alternative options can be explored, for example lending the box or offering only a part of the cards and expanding when there is interest from the bereaved teenager.
- Increasing understanding and awareness among school employees is essential for the handreiking box's implementation to proceed successfully. This can be accomplished using a number of approaches, such as placing informative posters on the wall or making brief videos which explain the function and usage of the product. Because of the prior knowledge the school staff will be better able to navigate through school when a teenager faces parental loss.

In conclusion, *Handreiking Rouw* is the proposed design of this project. The recommendations presented for the design, future research, and implementation will provide guidance for further development of *Handreiking Rouw*. This will increase the likelihood of transforming the concept into a functional product. A product with the desired effect: enhancing the social support in the school environment.



Personal Reflection

For the past few months, I fully immersed myself in the complex world of grief and social support for teenagers in secondary education. In this chapter, I will reflect on the challenges I faced, the lessons I learned as a designer, my personal learnings, and my future aspirations as a designer.

The challenges

During the project, I experienced two main challenges. First of all, the difficulty of the recruitment of stakeholders, specifically teenagers with parental loss and teachers. As I initiated the project without a client, I had to arrange the participants myself. The recruitment process was specifically challenging for bereaved teenagers due to the sensitivity of the topic and their vulnerable age. When I finally connected with the target group, I was amazed by the personal experiences the participants entrusted to me.

The second challenge was merging the different experiences and stories into conclusions without losing the value of the personal experiences. Since the experiences of grief differ for each individual.

Learnings as a designer

I learned a lot during this project, the most important learnings are captured in three main takeaways.

- First of all, the stakeholder involvement in the design process. This was the first time I involved various stakeholders and experts in multiple stages of the design process. I was pleased with the valuable input I received each time. I learned to involve

stakeholders in the early stages of the design process when ideas are not that clear. I even experienced the value of showing unfinished ideas, especially during the co-reflection sessions. I realised that it enhances the participation of the participants.

- Second, trust the design process when having to switch from research to a meaningful design. Even though I was initially scared about moving from my research to a meaningful design, this project taught me to trust the design process and the skills I have developed over the past few years.
- Finally, the collaboration with peers. I realized that involving sparring partners is crucial. Sharing ideas and telling the story repeatedly helped me to refine my findings and create a more meaningful design solution. I am grateful for all the social support I received myself during this thesis.

Personal Learnings

The project also made me reflect on my personal approach of grief and offering support. Although I have spent many hours researching this topic, it still does not make it any easier to offer support when people around me are confronted with the loss of a loved one. It is, and

will always be a sensitive and delicate topic. Nevertheless, it made me realize how important it is to pay attention to the loss of someone and offer opportunities to talk about the loved one who was lost. Diving into this topic also led me to deep conversations with my friends who experienced parental loss. I learned things about a period of their time I was not aware of.

My future interest

During this project, I explored a topic that is often researched by other disciplines, such as psychology and pedagogy. It was gratifying to realize that my designer skills were valued in this area by experts. This experience confirmed that my skills as a designer can be applied to complex societal issues, beyond the traditional product design I knew when starting my first day as an Industrial Design Engineering student.

After dedicating many hours to this project, my passion for using design expertise to improve mental health has only grown stronger. There is still so much left to explore in the future.



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