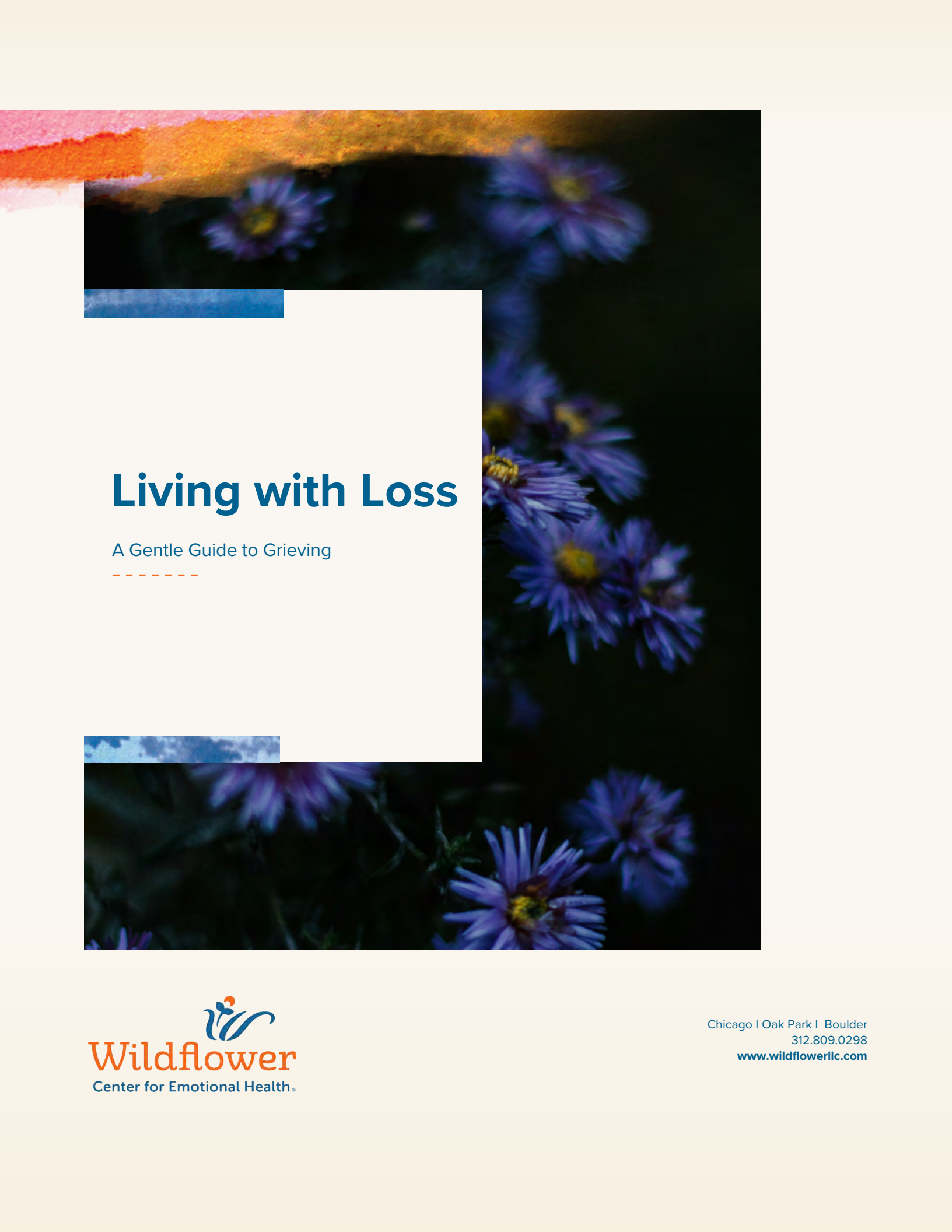




Living with Loss

A Gentle Guide to Grieving



Living With Loss: A Gentle Guide to Grieving

by Wildflower Center for Emotional Health

Grief and loss touch each of us differently. There is no right way to mourn, and no single path through heartache. At Wildflower Center for Emotional Health, we offer individual and couples therapy to support you during this challenging time. If you're seeking guidance, connection, or simply a place to begin, we're here to walk alongside you.

To learn more, visit our website or call us at 312.809.0298. We also hope the resources below provide clarity and help you care for yourself – body, heart, and mind – as you navigate grief.

Introduction

The loss of a loved one can be devastating. It shapes us, shatters us, and leaves us changed forever. The experience of grief is both universal and profoundly personal. Many of us do not have much exposure or experience with death before we experience it first-hand. The societal message to move past it as quickly as possible denies us the time, space, and environment to experience our emotions and process the grief fully.

Grief is a natural and adaptive response to overwhelming feelings of loss (Winokuer & Harris, 2012).

When To Seek Professional Help

Grieving the loss of a loved one is one of the most painful and disorienting experiences we face. While grief is a natural response to loss, that doesn't mean it's easy to navigate. Intense emotions like sadness, anger, guilt, and numbness are all part of what's considered a "normal" grief process. Still, you don't need to wait until grief feels unmanageable to seek support.

Therapy can be a meaningful resource at any point in your grieving process, whether you're feeling stuck, overwhelmed, isolated, or simply in need of space to make sense of your experience. If your grief feels especially prolonged or is interfering with daily functioning, you may be facing what's known as complicated grief, and professional support is especially important.

Grief Therapy

At Wildflower, we honor the uniqueness of each person's grief; there is no single path, no "right" timeline, and no fixed set of rules. Our clinicians approach clients with empathy, openness, and deep respect for the complexity of loss.

Grief therapy provides a space to feel seen and supported, whether you're mourning the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, the loss of your pre-parent self, a traumatic birth experience, or the life you once knew before illness or major change.



Grief often brings not only pain, but also a deep sense of disorientation and lack of control. A central part of the therapeutic process is learning to sit with that discomfort, rather than rush to fix or escape it. Our clinicians offer psychoeducation about the grieving process and help challenge the societal pressure to "move on" or "get over it." In allowing ourselves to fully feel and honor what we've lost, we also create room to grow around the grief and to carry it with compassion and resilience.

Stages of Grief

Many people are familiar with the five stages of grief first introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. While this model has helped bring attention to the emotional impact of loss, in its original formulation it has introduced a misconception of grief as a strict, linear process. In reality, grief is anything but orderly. Models like Kübler-Ross's, and others that have followed, can offer useful language, but they don't capture the full range of individual grief (Winokuer & Harris, 2012).

Grief is deeply personal. This said, the search for meaning is one of its prominent and common themes. After a significant loss, many of us find our core beliefs and assumptions shaken. We may question our identity, our relationships, or our place in the world. This disruption, while painful, also opens the door to growth.

As we adapt to a new reality, we often begin to make meaning in ways that help us integrate our loss—not by “moving on,” but by learning how to live with what has changed.

Types of Grief

Grief can take many forms. According to the National Institutes of Health, there are five common types of grief: **anticipatory, disenfranchised, complicated, acute, and normal grief.**

Anticipatory grief happens before a loss, often when facing a terminal illness or significant life change, as people begin mourning what is to come.

Disenfranchised grief occurs when a loss is not widely recognized or validated, such as pregnancy loss, the death of a pet, or losing someone to a stigmatized illness, making it harder to grieve openly.

Complicated grief is deep, long-lasting, and often tied to traumatic loss. It can delay mourning, bring overwhelming emotions, and make it difficult to move forward.

Acute grief is the immediate wave of emotions after a loss, including shock, confusion, and intense sadness, often after a death, breakup, or major transition.

Normal grief includes a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioral responses that naturally evolve. *It is important to note that in this context, “normal” is a medical term—all forms of grief are valid and natural.*

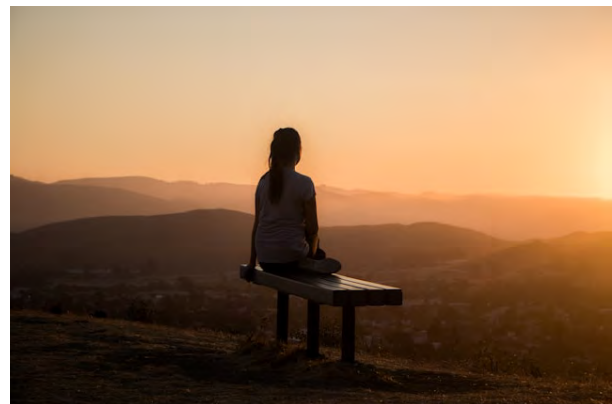
Common Responses to Grief

Many of us anticipate sadness to be the most prominent feeling of grief, but in reality, that is not always the case. Anger, numbness, guilt, and remorse are very likely to surface as we contemplate the person we have lost and things we wish we had done or said to them.

There are also cognitive effects some may experience, such as an inability to focus or difficulty with memory.

We can experience physical symptoms of grief that may even mimic the ones that our loved ones went through in the end stage of their life. Physical exhaustion can accompany feelings of anxiety and agitation in the mind. Headaches, body aches, difficulty sleeping, digestive problems, and accidents are also commonly reported (Winokuer & Harris, 2012, p. 83).

Those experiencing grief may also seek out activities, places, or practices that their loved ones enjoyed in an attempt to reconnect with them. Many bereaved individuals describe their daily life as functioning on “autopilot” and an inability to be fully present in mind, body, and spirit (Winokuer & Harris, 2012, p. 86).



Grief In Marginalized Communities

There is an inherent form of grief that exists through having a marginalized identity. Living within a society that upholds systemic oppression, ongoing marginalization, and historical trauma can cause people to experience a continual state of mourning.

This particular form of grief can feel particularly isolating and helpless as it threatens one's safety through their identity. If you hold a marginalized identity, forming and aligning with identity-based community spaces can help alleviate some of the isolation felt through solidarity within collective loss.

Common Myths About Grief

Myth: Time heals all wounds.

Time cannot replace the loss of someone or something dear to us. Instead, our lives grow around grief, and we might notice it more or less at different times.

Myth: Grief follows a predictable set of stages.

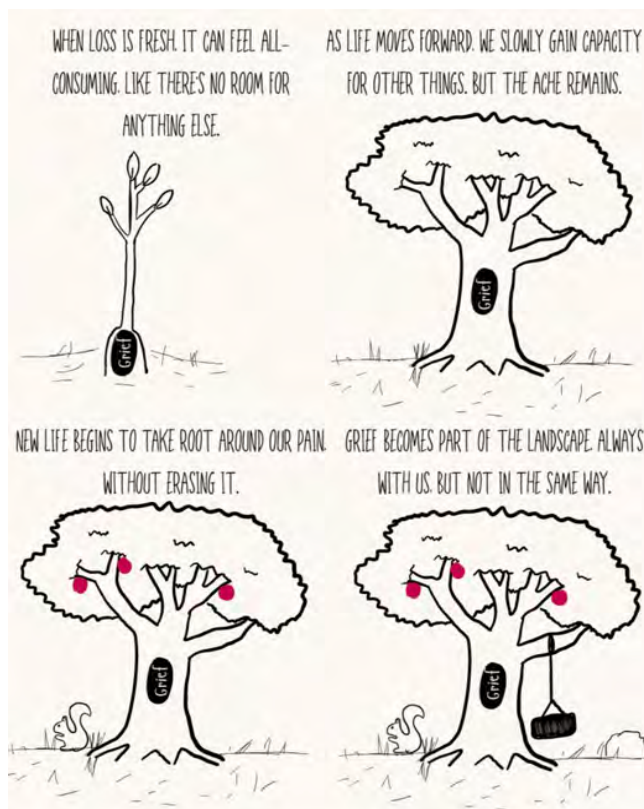
The “five stages of grief” are not linear. They describe the emotional experience of those facing loss, but the order and repetition of the stages can change and evolve as life progresses.

Myth: You should move on after a certain amount of time.

Grief is not something you simply “get over”; it is a lifelong adjustment to life without someone or something dear to us.

Myth: There is a right way to grieve.

Grief is a personal process; the things that bring you comfort may not work for someone else, and that is okay.



Helpful Resources



Tools

3 Metaphors for Grief

Psychoeducation around grief, normalizing grief, and being "caught up" in strong feelings

End-of-Life Experiences by Dr. Christopher Kerr

For individuals and families with loved ones in hospice/ nearing the end of life. Dr. Kerr's research and tools aim to reduce fear and foster acceptance during end-of-life journeys.

Articles and Books

Growing around grief—another way of looking at grief and recovery by Dr. Lois Tonkin

Introduces the concept of new life experiences that allow us to grow around the grief we carry.

What's Your Grief by Eleanor Haley, MS, and Litsa Williams, MA, LCSW-C

Discusses the most common grief experiences and breaks them down into manageable components. Also provides coping tools for reflection.

Permission to Mourn: A New Way to Do Grief by Tom Zuba

Offers a deeply compassionate approach to grieving.

“It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand” by Megan Devine

A validating guide that challenges society's misconceptions about grief, offering solace and support to those navigating profound loss in a world that often fails to understand it.

Articles and Books Continued

Can Anyone Tell Me? Essential Questions About Grief and Loss by Meghan Riordan Jarvis

Psychotherapist and grief specialist Meghan Riordan Jarvis shares a research-based resource filled with clinical insights to these questions and more, along with practical steps for navigating loss.

The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss by Mary-Frances O'Connor, PhD

A grief expert and neuroscientist shares groundbreaking discoveries about what happens in our brain when we grieve, providing a new paradigm for understanding love, loss, and learning.

Resources for Children

National Alliance for Children's Grief

The alliance is a national organization of professionals dedicated to supporting children and the networks and communities surrounding them.

Sesame Workshop - Grief

Resources to support children navigating grief from Sesame Workshop, the global nonprofit behind Sesame Street.

Dougy Center - Resources for Kids (0-5)

Articles and activities to help children navigate grief.

Dougy Center - Resources for Kids (6-12)

Articles and activities to help adolescents navigate grief.

The Children's Room

Resources for children, teens, and families.

Loss of a Child

The Compassionate Friends

An organization that provides support and resources for families grieving the death of a child or grandchild.

Bereaved Parents of the USA

BPUSA provides information and resources to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents after the death of their loved one.

Podcasts

Terrible, Thanks for Asking

A show by author Nora McInerny that lets real people get real honest about how they're really doing.

Good Mourning

Grief and bereavement podcast that explores all elements of grief, loss, mental health and how to heal.

The Grief Gang

A podcast normalizing grief.

Grief Out Loud

A podcast by Dougy Center offering a mix of personal stories and tips for supporting children and teens.

Griefcast

A podcast that examines the human experience of grief and death.

"I swear on my mother's grave" by Dana Black

A memoir/podcast about the loss of a mother.

Community Organizations

The Dinner Party

A community-based organization that brings together grieving adults over shared meals to foster connection, conversation, and healing through the power of peer support.

The Order of the Good Death

An organization that aims to create open conversation about death, grieving, ritual, advocacy, end-of-life care, and maintaining connections with loved ones who have died.

The Compassionate Friends

A self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

Support Groups

Fox Valley Hands of Hope - Chicago

Grieving Online Community

JourneyCare Hospice

Twinless Twins Support Group

Websites

The Center for Loss & Life Transition

Led by death educator and grief counselor Dr. Alan Wolfelt, this organization is dedicated to helping people who are grieving and those who care for them.

Recover from Grief

This website offers numerous ideas on how to creatively channel your grief into artwork, music, poetry, writing, and other creative activities. There are also innumerable pages of resources and educational materials.

What's Your Grief

Comprehensive grief education and support.

Grieving.com

An active online support community with message boards for different types of loss, including child loss, pet loss, and sudden death.

Modern Loss

An inclusive space for candid conversation about grief, with personal essays, resources, and events for all types of loss.

Hotlines & Warmlines

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 833-852-6262

Pet Loss Helpline : 630-325-1600



For more information on infertility-related grief, please see our **Coping with Infertility Resource Guide**.

For more information on grief related to pregnancy and infant loss, please see our **Pregnancy and Infant Loss Resource Guide**.

Final thoughts

Grief is a natural response to loss, and there's no single timeline or right way to experience it. At Wildflower, we recognize that each person's grieving process is unique, and support looks different for everyone.

Whether your grief is recent or you have been carrying it for some time, it's okay to seek help, ask questions, or simply take a moment to pause and reflect.

We hope this guide helps you navigate life after loss. If you find yourself wanting additional support, our team is here to help you explore what healing might look like for you, at your own pace and in your own way.

References

Ernstmeyer, K., Christman, E., & Open RN. (2021). *Grief and loss*. In K. Ernstmeyer & E. Christman (Eds.), *Nursing fundamentals* (2nd ed., eBook ed.). WisTech Open. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK591827/>

Kübler-Ross, E. (1970). *On death and dying*. Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing Co.

Mayo Clinic Staff. (n.d.). *Complicated grief: Symptoms and causes*. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved May 28, 2025, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/symptoms-causes/syc-20360374>

Winokuer, H. R., & Harris, D. (2012). *Principles and practice of grief counseling* (1st ed.). Springer.



If you are looking to start psychotherapy at Wildflower, please reach out to our intake team by calling 312.809.0298 or completing the inquiry form on our website.