

The Art of Managing Your Palette of Grief® After a Traumatic Loss

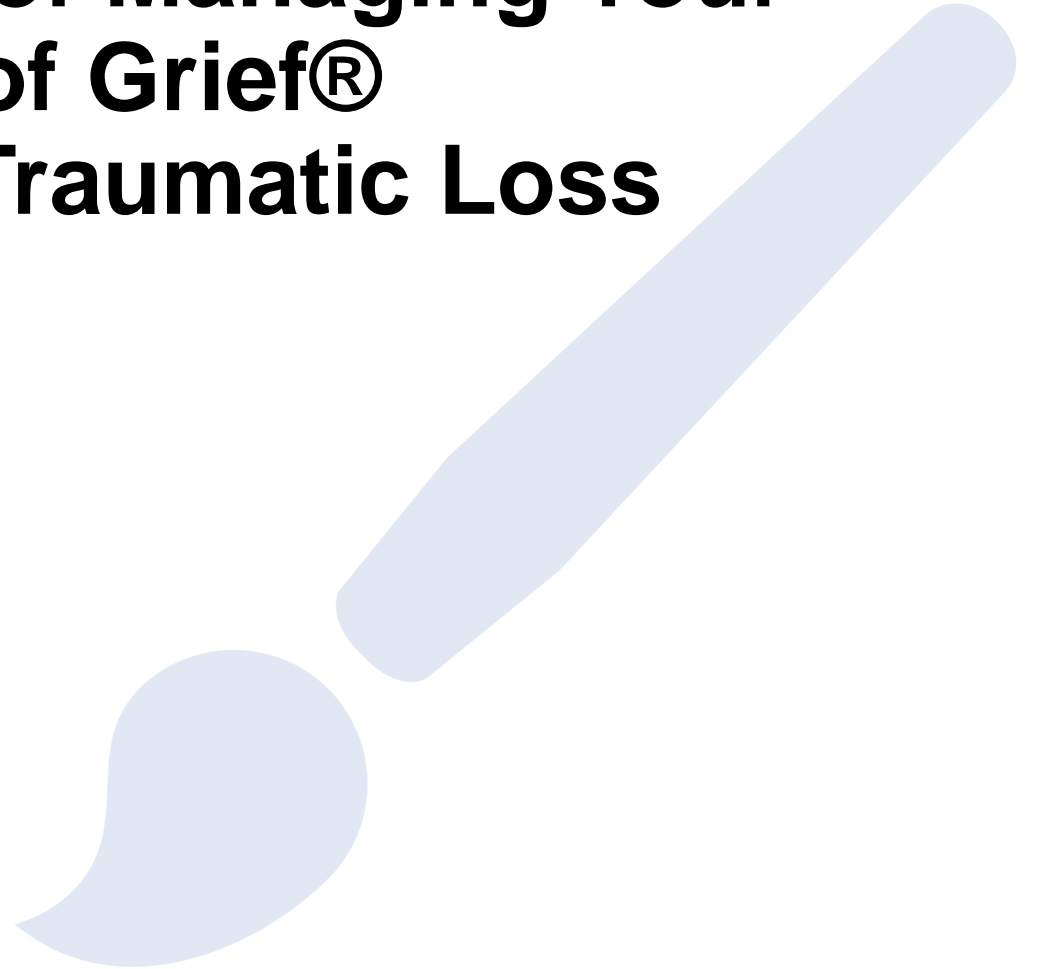
Town of Athol

Tuesday, October 24, 2023

Presented by

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www.griefworkcenter.com





“I searched for meaning in my loss, of a suicide, and in my own life. I questioned why. In only three weeks, my dad would have become a grandfather to triplets.”

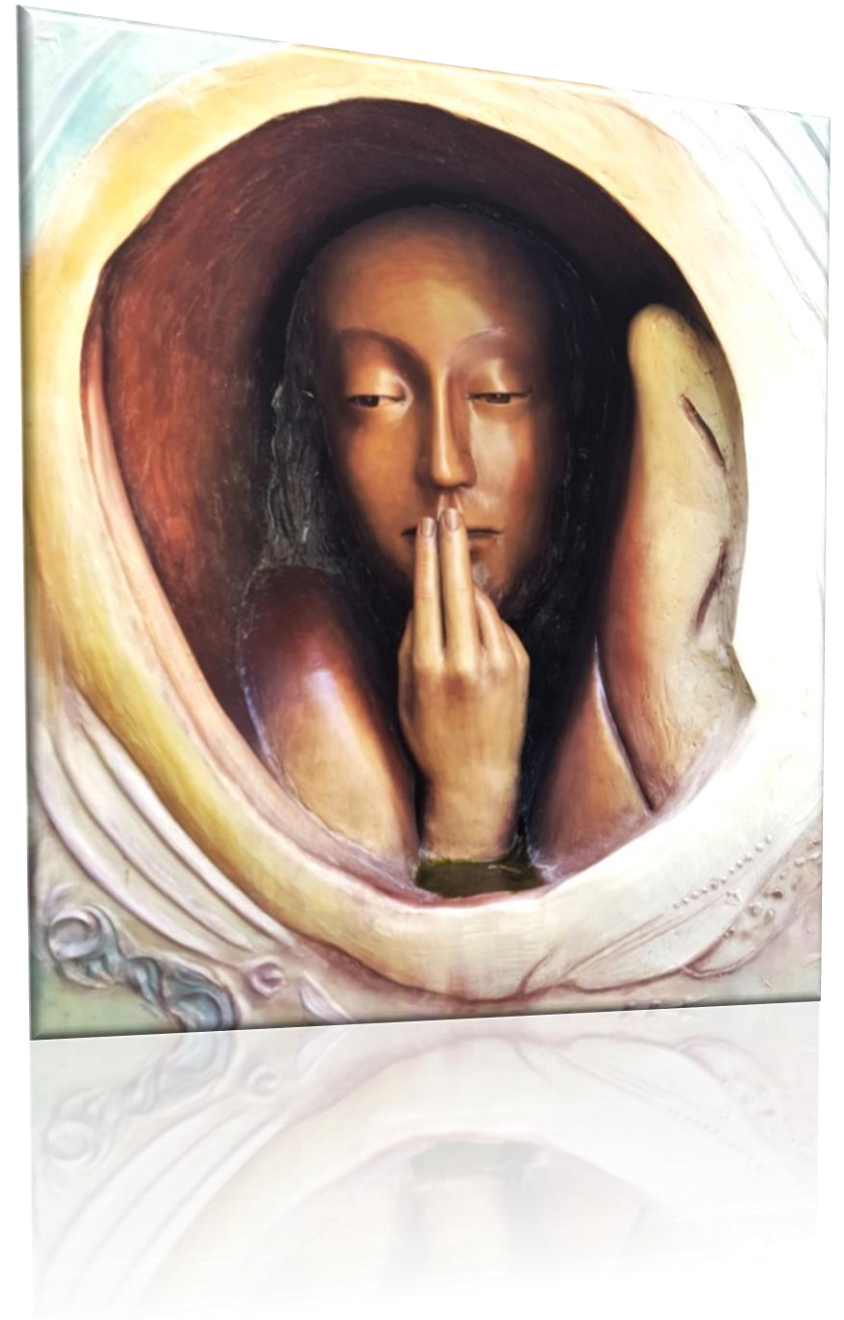
Rubel, B. (2000). *Grief Magazine*. Surviving Suicide:
the many colors of grief. 28-29



- Has a life challenge propelled you into a career?

As a Thanatologist, I'm a Specialist In:

- Sudden death and mourning
- Social and psychological aspects of traumatic grief and bereavement



“On 9/11, I was a hospice bereavement coordinator, facilitated a bereavement support group, and taught a master’s-level health crisis course at Brooklyn College. During the car ride back from teaching, I felt compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. I needed self-care strategies to replenish myself, not only in the days following Sept. 11th, but every day thereafter.”

– *Barbara Rubel, 2015*

Rubel, B. (2018). *Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Providing compassion during a time of need*. MA: Western Schools.

“We don’t see things as they
are, we see them as we are”

– Anais Nin





Compassionate communities
struggling with bereavement need:

- Awareness-raising initiatives
- Resources distribution to inform public of current grief theories
- Clear & open communication between specialized bereavement services & communities so each is informed of unique roles (Logan, et al., 2017)

Resilient Communities





**WHAT
BROUGHT
YOU HERE?**



- What is Your Greatest Strength?

Identify Determinants that Influence the Grief Process



1. *Death related factors*
2. Relationship issues
3. Mental health and well-being factors
4. Social and economic circumstances

Anticipatory Grief



- Begins after diagnosis
- Grief is influenced by emotionally preparing, changing relationship in dying trajectory
- How grief is managed before death

Gaynor, 2018

When You Are Able to Say Goodbye

“He said, ‘I have been married to this woman for 65 years. How do I say goodbye?’ As a bereavement coordinator of hospice, I was responsible for providing comfort, yet my heart ached as I search for the right words.”

Rubel, B. (November/December 2004). Facing Our Fears in Patient Death. *Imprint*, professional magazine for nursing students, National Student Nurses Association Inc., 46-49.

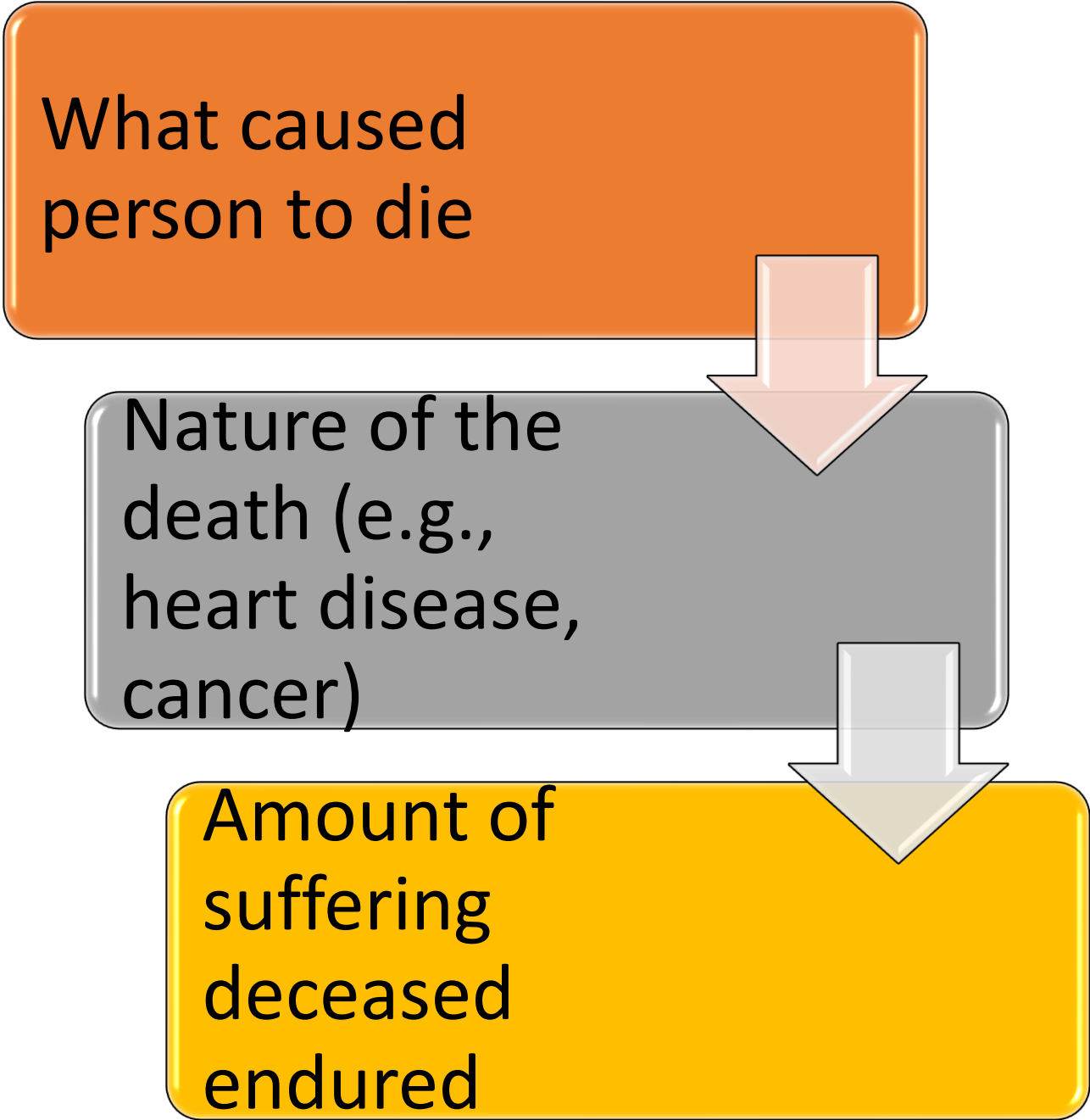
Manner of Death (NASH)

Classified into causes and circumstances:

- **Natural cause:** ordinary, expected, opposed
- **Accidental death:** unintentional, unplanned (e.g., accident)
- **Suicide:** intentionally takes their own life
- **Homicide:** intentionally takes life of another

Undetermined when insufficient information leaves coroner unable to name manner

What caused
person to die



```
graph TD; A[What caused person to die] --> B[Nature of the death (e.g., heart disease, cancer)]; B --> C[Amount of suffering deceased endured];
```

Nature of the
death (e.g.,
heart disease,
cancer)

Amount of
suffering
deceased
endured

Type of Death



Ambiguous Loss

- Uncertain - dead or alive
- Cannot make sense of situation complicates grief (Boss, 2012; Boss, 2022)
 1. Physical presence and psychological absence (e.g., Alzheimer's, TBI)
 2. Psychological presence and physical absence (e.g., missing person, kidnapping)

Death Notification

How did they hear the bad news?
(e.g., alone, social media, news,
with strangers waiting in ED)



Comfortability of death notifiers

Place of Death

- 60% deaths-acute care hospitals, 20%-nursing homes, 20% - home (Stanford School of Medicine, 2018)
- Vacation, college
- Finding the body

Factors That Influence Prolonged Grief

Preventable:
avoidable,
unnecessary (e.g.,
alcohol-related car
crash) issues of blame
and culpability

Untimely death:
inopportune time and
sooner than anyone
had expected

Who is to Blame?

Responsibility:
distribution of
responsibility

Accountability:
who hastens death,
who is ultimately
responsible agent

Violent Death

Symptoms: insomnia, anxiety, anger, avoidance of reminders, fear (Rheingold & Williams, 2018)

7-8% of those in the general population will develop PTSD

Sudden Death

No period of preparation because death did not occur over time. (e.g., fire, drug overdose, heart attack)

No time of infirmity, no preparation leading up to death to prepare (Block, 2018)

Traumatic Death

- Distressing event with personal impact (e.g., death of child)
- Interpreted in such a way, it's overwhelming
- Does not have to be violent or sudden





Multiple Deaths

- At same time/close together (Worden, 2018)
- Bereavement overload (Kastenbaum, 1969)
- Grieve for everyone same
- One more than another
- Delay grief of one/focus on other
- Avoid dealing with one/cope with other

Adverse Childhood Experiences **ACES** and Pre- Existing Trauma

- Unresolved past loss, childhood trauma, could have higher health/well-being challenges as adults-impacts current grief
- **Abuse:** parents psychologically or physically abusive, sexual abuse
- **Neglect:** emotional, physical neglect
- **Household dysfunction:** alcoholism, drug use, loss of parent, depression, mental health, crisis, mother abused, family member in jail



ACES and Pre-Existing Trauma

- Prior trauma and ACEs, bereaved adult is more prone to PTSD and prolonged grief when they sustain traumatic loss as an adult

Identify Determinants that Influence the Grief Process



1. Death related factors
2. **Relationship issues**
3. Mental health and well-being factors
4. Social and economic circumstances

Psychological Proximity

- Relationship, kinship, closeness, and bond
- Greater risk of severe, prolonged grief after death of spouse, parent, or child (Wilson, et al., 2018)
- Sometimes negative feelings toward deceased are in same number as positive feelings



**WHAT
BROUGHT
YOU HERE?**

Living Within Your Value System Can Provide Comfort



I would like to be remembered for my . . .

- Being a good friend
- Care for my family
- Honesty
- Faithfulness
- Helping others
- Love of God
- Hard work
- Empathy
- Fairness
- Generosity

Schoenbeck, 2010, The Remembrance Study



Identify Determinants that Influence the Grief Process



1. Death related factors
2. Relationship issues
3. **Health and well-being factors**
4. Social and economic circumstances

Mental/Physical Health

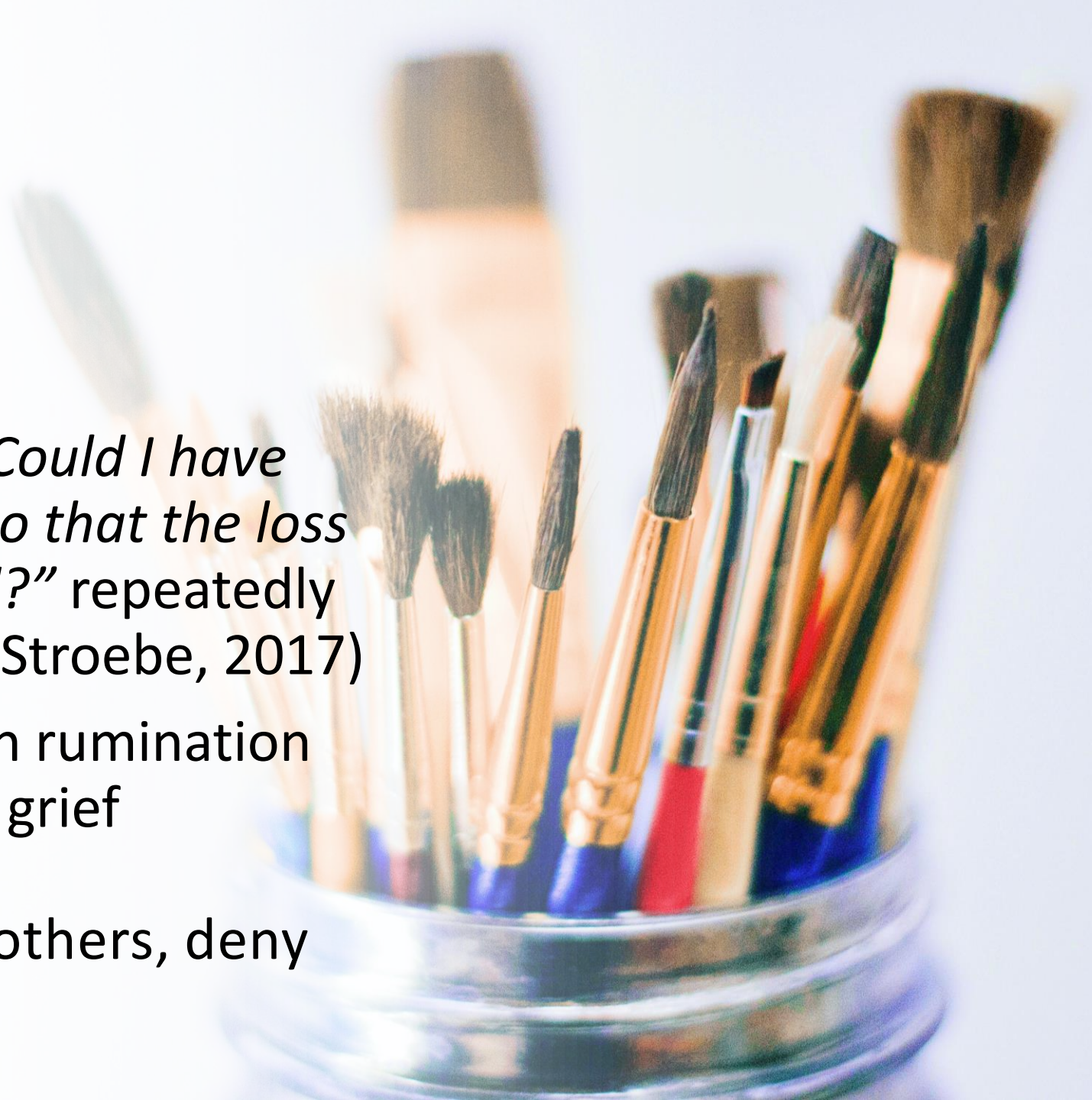
- Psychiatric diagnosis (e.g., PTSD, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia) will affect reaction to loss
- Chronic health conditions (e.g., diabetes, pain, heart disease)
- Intellectual Disabilities

Wellness Factors

- Each dimension should be met in context of loss
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identified eight dimensions of wellness:
 1. Emotional; 2. Environmental;
 3. Financial 4. Intellectual;
 5. Occupational; 6. Physical;
 7. Social; and 8. Spiritual

Unsuccessful Coping Response

- Counterfactual Thinking: “*Could I have done something different so that the loss could have been prevented?*” repeatedly focus on reasons (Eisma & Stroebe, 2017)
- Strong association between rumination (repetitive) and severity of grief (Delespaulx & Zech, 2015)
- Avoidance coping: blame others, deny death, self-medicating

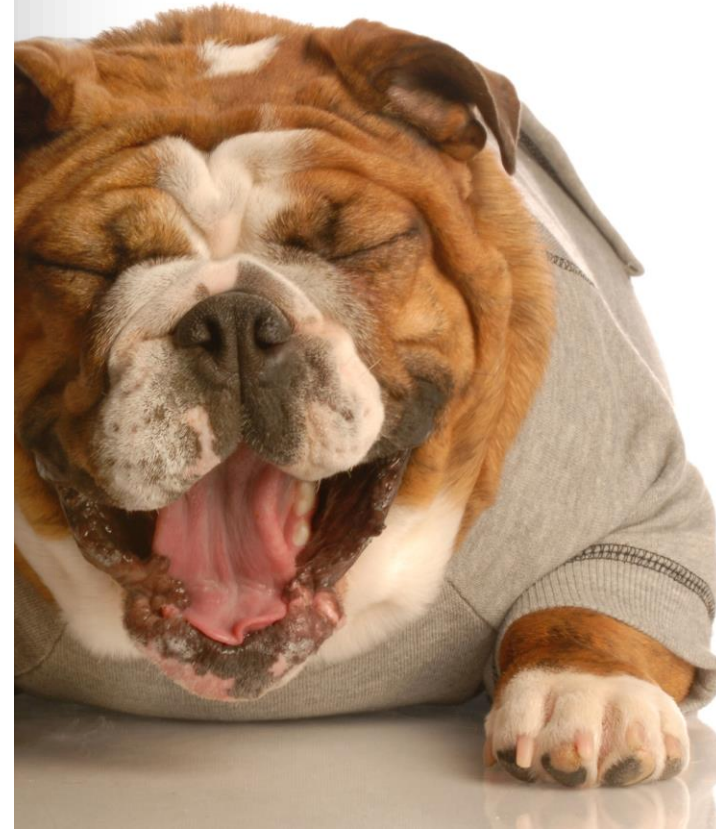


- Intuitive and instrumental patterns of grief (Martin & Doka, 2021)
- Based on personality/culture, not gender

Intuitive pattern:

- significantly more 'feeling' in processing grief,' (e.g., cry, shout, withdraw) (Gamino et al., 2020)

Grief Style (Patterns) Intuitive





Grief Style (Patterns): Instrumental



Instrumental Pattern

- expressed cognitively, problem solving, through actions
- Thinking predominant over feelings (less intense emotional displays)
- Reluctance to talk about feelings
- Emotional expression in private
- Control of self/environment
- Both genders: either intuitive or instrumental style or blended pattern (Martin & Doka, 2021)

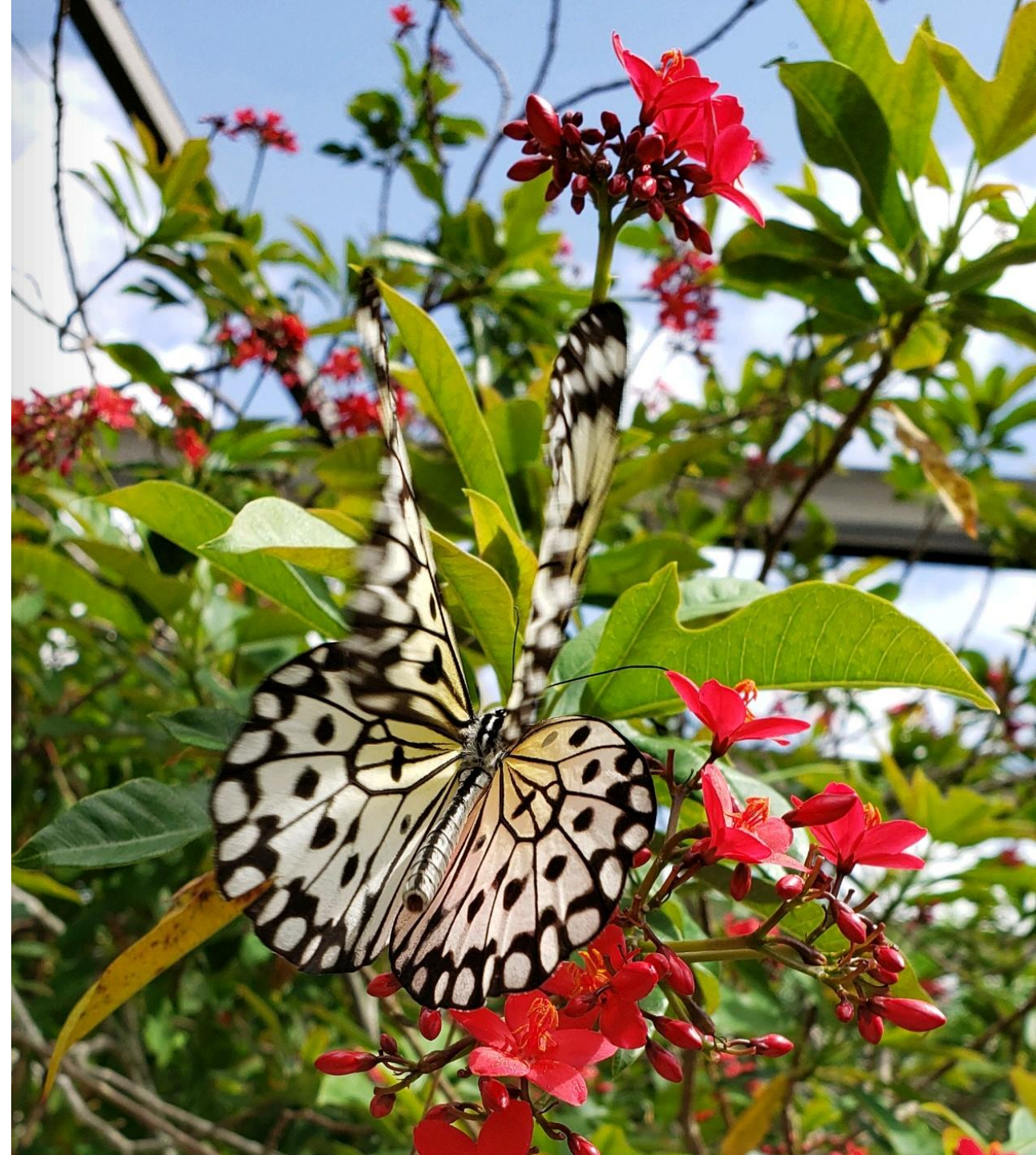
Posttraumatic Growth Model (PTG)

- Positive psychological change-result of struggle with challenging circumstance (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)
- View self/others differently, reevaluate priorities
- Appreciate life, transformed by trauma (e.g., memorial fund, faith) disrupted assumptive world or sense of self
- Pursue mental health services, alone or in groups, report higher levels of PTG (Ryan & Ripley, 2021)

Posttraumatic Growth Model (PTG)

Five domains:

- Greater strength
- Closer relationships
- New opportunities
- Gratitude for life
- Intensifying spiritual life



Concurrent Stressors Unrelated to Grief

- Health: diabetes, mental illness
- Self-induced: need for control
- Environmental: traffic congestion
- Relational: family conflicts, aging parents
- Job: lack of family-friendly policies
- Online: social media replaying death
- Death system: settling estate; bureaucratic process

Identify Determinants that Influence the Grief Process



1. Death related factors
2. Relationship issues
3. Mental health and well-being factors
4. **Social and economic circumstances**

Disenfranchised Grief and Perceived Support

- Few mourning customs due to COVID social distancing measures
- Cannot openly acknowledge death; not sanctioned by society; mourning publicly avoided; don't feel supported (Thompson & Doka, 2017)
- After stigmatized death, a perceived lack of social support



Some people are real. *Some people are good.*

Some people are fake *and some people*
are real good at being fake

-Picturequotes.com



A collection of various masks, including sugar skulls and theatrical masks, displayed on a wall. The masks are arranged in rows, with some hanging and others standing. The colors are diverse, including white, gold, black, and various pastel shades. Some masks have intricate designs and patterns.

Stability of Life

- Stable: secure, reliable, established, well-being
- Instability in family influences grief
- Presence of other issues in life before loss

Rubel B. (2019). Loss, Grief and Bereavement (4th ed.) MA; Western Schools

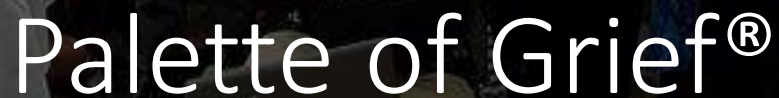
Secondary Losses

- Result of a primary loss
- Economic (e.g., sell house)
- Changes in routines, loss of identity
- Lost companionship, family role often overlooked (Zhai et al., 2020)
- Death of only child-no grandchildren (Wilson, et al., 2018)

Describe the Palette of Grief® after a Sudden and Traumatic Death



- Palette holds and blends paint colors - holds and blends grief
- Metaphors: journey, tidal wave, roller coaster
- Palette of Grief® metaphor for blending of reactions after final separation
- Emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, religious, spiritual colors of loss



Empirical Models of Mourning Help Bereaved Individuals Manage Traumatic Grief

- 4 Tasks of Mourning
- Dual Process Model
- Continuing Bonds
- Meaning Reconstruction



4 Tasks of Mourning



Abnormal grief reactions occur when people are unable to complete four tasks of mourning (Worden, 2018)

1st. Accept the reality of loss

2nd. Process the pain of grief

3rd. Adjust to a world without deceased

4th. Find enduring connection with deceased in midst of embarking on a new life

Dual Process Model

- Imaginary spring: face or avoid feelings; oscillation approach toward/away to cope. If one type of coping used disproportionately-higher levels of distress
- **Loss-Oriented (LO):** behaviors toward grief work, intrusion of grief, break bonds, relocation, denial, avoid restorative changes
- **Restoration (RO):** behaviors toward coping with stressors secondary to loss (finances, distractions, avoid grief, roles, secondary losses)

Stroebe & Schut, 1999, 2001, 2021



Continuing Bonds

- Don't sever bonds
 - Maintain inner representation (spiritual connection) of deceased
 - Hold them in memories
 - Ordinary aspect of bereavement in practically all grief models
 - Integrated into professional care
- Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Bowman, 2017

Meaning Reconstruction and Loss Narratives

- Shared narratives
- Stories marked by loss
- Aids in thinking, feeling, acting through account of what happened
- Weave loss into life story
- Basic assumptions about personal worldview are changed
- Reconstruct relationship

Neimeyer, 2001; Neimeyer, 2020

“Sometimes I feel like relationships consist of telling your same life stories to different people until someone finally appreciates them.”

-Kate Rockland





My Rock Is. . .





Recognize How To Cope With Prolonged Grief Disorder Symptoms

Free Gift

<https://www.griefworkcenter.com/palette-of-grief-2/>

Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Identity Disruption

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Part of yourself died
- Look inward as you struggle with who you are now
- Social support
- Somatic therapy



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Marked Sense of Disbelief



Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Confront loss
- Examine reality of loss
- Dual process model: oscillate toward/away from coping
- Maintain routine
- Don't make major life changes

Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Avoidance of Reminders

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Display/give away belongings
- Prepare for anniversary reactions
- Plan a distraction
- Set realistic goals
- Positive self-talk
- Reframe problems



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Intense Emotional Pain

(anger, bitterness, sorrow)

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Keep boundaries
- Use metaphors
- Journal
- Poetry
- Music
- Breathing
- Mindfulness



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Difficulty Moving On and Engaging in Ongoing Life

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Pursue goals and interests
- Thanatechnology
- Support system: friends, family
- Continue the bonds



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

- **Emotional Numbness**

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Replenish to feel joy again
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Healthy diet
- Self-compassion
- Biofeedback, EMDR, PGD therapy



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Life is Meaningless

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Find moments of awe
- Find joy in everyday life
- Live core values
- Prayer, spiritual beliefs
- Rituals, memorialization
- Find gratitude
- Making meaning-purpose
- Posttraumatic growth



Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

Intense Loneliness

Coping With PGD Symptoms

- Look at photos
- Consider a tattoo
- Ask for a sign
- Plan for future
- Pursue interests
- Share your narrative
- Support group

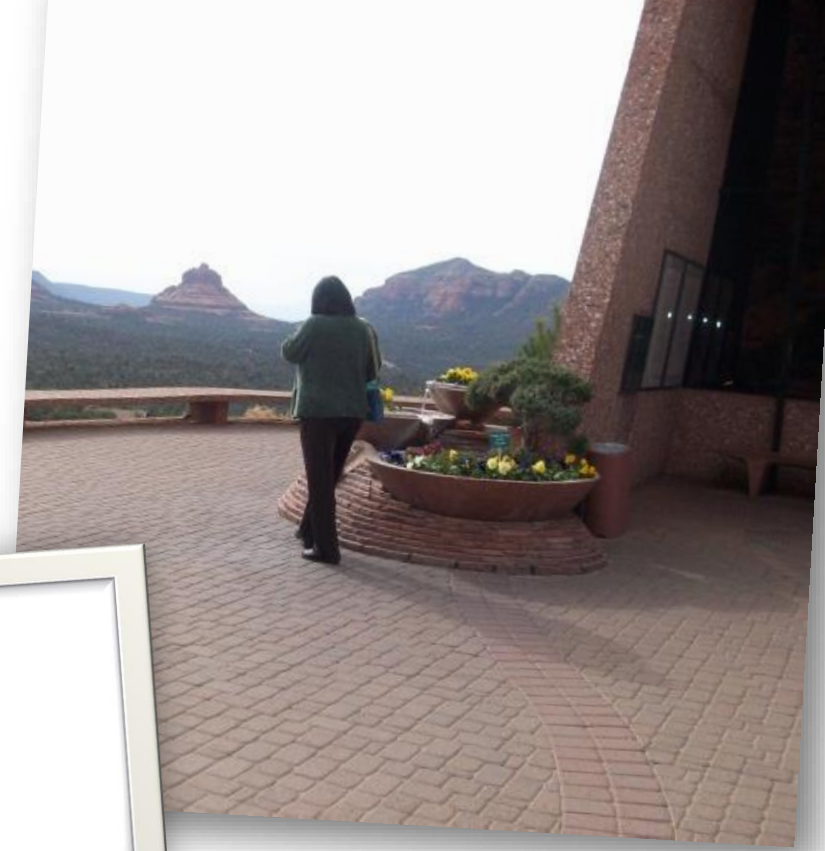


Pets Provide Comfort to Those Who Are Grieving



Connected on a Universal Scale

- Awe environment
- Spiritual presence of a connection to something greater than yourself
- Focus beyond self toward compassion and relationships



Change the way you look at things
and the things you look at change.

- Wayne W. Dyer





Ethnicity, Culture, Spirituality, Religion

- Ethnicity: mourning traditions, customs-same racial background
- Culture: shared beliefs, values, practices
- Religion: outlook of hope, relief, coping, or meaning in life (Braam, 2017)
- Spirituality: influences grief, reflects what matters, source of hope (Bowman, 2016)



“We never remember days, only moments.”
— Cesare Pavese



- **Flexibility**
- **Attitude**
- **Boundaries**
- **United**
- **Laughter**
- **Optimism**
- **Understanding job satisfaction**
- **Self compassion**

FABULOUS Framework for Wellness



“Oh great, just when I’ve cleaned up from the earthquake.”

Town of Athol, MA

Thank you for attending today's program

A stylized signature of 'Barbara' in a purple cursive font, with a teal butterfly graphic integrated into the letter 'B'. Below the signature, the name 'RUBEL' is written in a bold, purple, sans-serif font.

Barbara
RUBEL

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