

## Grief Across the Lifespan

Presented by  
Andy McNiel, M.A.

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### Today's Schedule & Topics

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Session One: 8:30 AM – 10:00 AM  
Foundations of Understanding Grief, Loss, and Our Role as Helpers (1.5 Hours)

Session Two: 10:10 AM – 11:30AM  
Special Considerations Children and Adolescents & Different Types of Losses in Adulthood

Session Three: 12:15 PM – 1:45 PM  
Becoming Grief Informed: Ethical Considerations When Caring For Bereaved Populations

Session Four: 1:55 PM – 3:15 PM  
Models, Techniques, and Tools for Bereavement Support

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### Session 1: Foundations of Understanding Grief, Loss, and Our Role as Helpers



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Universal Realities of Grief

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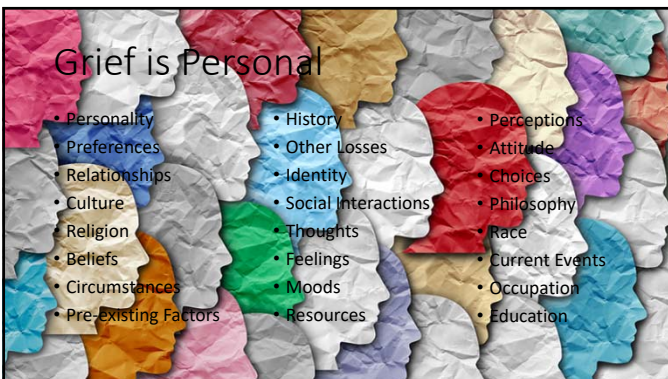
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What Has Grief  
Been Like For You?



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### Grief is Transitional

- Grief Has Motion / Movement
- Moving from One Way of Being to a New Way of Being
- "Grief is a Transition, Not An Illness" -  
-Phyllis Silverman
- Ideals at odds with Reality



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What are  
your  
milestones?



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### Grief is Integral

- Normal Developmental Process
- Adaptation to a New Normal
- A Process of Becoming
- A Necessary Part of Adapting
- Assimilating
- Accommodating
- Adapting



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### Validate & Normalize



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### Change, Transformation, Then & Now

- How have you changed?
- How have you grown?
- How are you different?
- How are you the same?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before?

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Grief is Visible & Invisible

- It is revealed through mourning and expression
- It is hidden in the depths of the mind and soul
- It sometimes lacks a language for expression
- It is sometimes visibly messy or uncomfortable
- It mostly lives under the surface

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- What do you have words for?
- What do you not have words for?
- How do you carry your grief?
- How does your grief manifest in your life?

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Grief is a Shared Experience

It does not happen in a vacuum, it is within a context of Family, Culture, Friends, Community, and Society



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Who Are Your People?



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Grief is Enduring

- Has not set timeline
- Is impacted by our choices along the way
- Changes and shapes us
- Impacts our world view and understanding of reality

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What Does Your Grief Look Like Now?

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## Universal Realities

- Personal
- Transitional
- Integral
- Visible and Invisible
- Shared Experience
- Enduring



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## Factors Influencing Grief

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### Preexisting Relationship with the Deceased

The relationship that an individual had with the deceased person prior to their death has an impact on an individual's grief

- Was the relationship contentious or conflictual?
- Was the relationship warm and caring?
- In what ways did the bereaved person depend on the person who died?
- What role did the deceased person play in the life of the bereaved person?
- Was the bereaved person the primary caregiver for the deceased person?

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## Culture

- End of life rituals
- Beliefs about death, dying, and bereavement
- Cultural norms for grieving
- Traditions and customs
- Way of living life and sense of community
- Religious beliefs and practices

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## Social Interactions and Relationships

- Family dynamics and interactions
- Response of friends and family
- Support system or lack of support system
- Changes in friendships or relationship dynamics due to a death
- Generational commonalities or differences
- Others dealing with similar losses

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## Personality and Preferences

Each person has their own way they feel most comfortable being in the world

- Expressive
- Reserved
- Preferred way of dealing with conflict or difficulties
- Different styles of grieving
- Different ways of coping

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### Relationship with the Parent of Caregiver

This is one of the top predictors of how a child will be able to navigate their grief in a healthy way

A photograph of a man in a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans standing on a sandy beach. He is smiling and has his arms around two children, a boy and a girl, who are also smiling. They are all wearing light-colored clothing.

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### Past Experiences of Loss

- “When we don’t know what to do, we do what we know”
- Past losses a person has experienced
- The way a person has coped with past losses or difficult circumstances

A photograph showing the backs of two children, a boy in a blue jacket and a girl in a pink jacket, standing in a cemetery. They are looking at a grave covered with a large arrangement of colorful flowers.

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### Gender

- Masculine and feminine grieving styles (Ken Doka and Terry Martin, *Grieving Beyond Gender*, 2010)
- Societal pressures
- Gender identity
- *Swallowed by a Snake* (Tom Golden)

A graphic illustration featuring silhouettes of several people's heads in profile, facing right. The silhouettes are in various colors: teal, red, and dark blue. The background is a light blue gradient.

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### Age and Maturity Level

Grief at various stages of life

- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Young Adulthood
- Middle Adulthood
- Older Adulthood



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Session 2: Special Considerations  
Children and Adolescents & Different  
Types of Losses in Adulthood

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Three Categories of ACEs:



\*CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



- Two-thirds of participants reported at least one ACE.
- More than one in five reported three or more ACEs.
- As the number of ACEs increase so does the risk for Unhealthy Outcomes, including early death.

\*CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>

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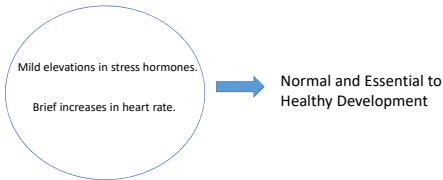
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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

### Positive Stress



\*Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

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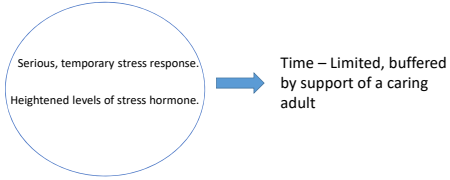
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### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

#### Tolerable Stress



*\*Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*

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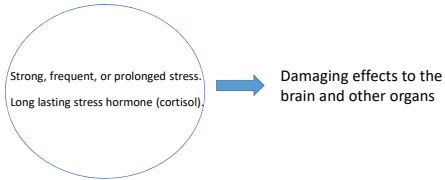
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### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

#### Toxic Stress



*\*Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*

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### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Alcoholism and alcohol abuse          | Multiple sexual partners            |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease | Sexually transmitted diseases       |
| Depression                            | Smoking                             |
| Fetal death                           | Suicide attempts                    |
| Health-related quality of life        | Unintended pregnancies              |
| Illicit drug use                      | Early initiation of smoking         |
| Ischemic heart disease                | Early initiation of sexual activity |
| Liver disease                         | Adolescent pregnancy                |
| Poor work performance                 | Risk for sexual violence            |
| Financial stress                      | Poor academic achievement           |
| Risk for intimate partner violence    |                                     |

*\*CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>*

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“The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.”

-The Center on the Developing Child  
Harvard University

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## Childhood Development & Grief

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**Birth - 2 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- Have no cognitive understanding of death
- Lack a language to express themselves
- Live in the moment

*How they grieve...*

- Unsettled, upset
- Searching or longing for the person who died
- Might want to be held more often
- Might have trouble sleeping

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**3 – 5 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- Limited to no understanding of death
- Do not understand the permanence of death
- They might be aware that someone is missing

*How they grieve...*

- Asking repetitive questions and needing to be told multiple times that the person has died
- Experience "magical thinking" about death
- May have periods of crying, sadness, and acting out, followed by periods of acting as if nothing happened
- Regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking, bedwetting, baby-talk)




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**6 – 8 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- Beginning to understand the concept of death, but death is still seen as irreversible and not permanent
- They might feel responsible for the death, thinking that something they did (or did not do) caused their person to die
- May think that death happens only to old people

*How they grieve...*

- Worry who else might die (other parent or other family members)
- Feel responsible
- Have bouts of sadness and other times of being seemingly "normal"
- Difficulty concentrating in school
- May have lots of questions for the adults in their lives
- Express their grief through play




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**9 – 11 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- Understand the concept of death
- Often understand the finality of death and that death is universal
- Still have hold on to some of their child-like understandings of death (in transition)



*How they grieve...*

- Might express sadness, anger, and intense feelings about the person's death
- May be curious about the dead body and what happens to a person after they die
- May ask a lot of questions about the circumstances of the death
- Worry about who else might die or that they might die

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**12 - 14 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- Fully understand that death is final and universal
- An emerging abstract understanding of death
- Curious about the details of the death
- Wonder what happens to people after they die



*How they grieve...*

- May be very private in their grief
- Though they may cry or feel intense emotions, may mask them with others
- Sometimes act as if nothing happened and go on with life in a seemingly "normal" way

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**15 - 18 Years Old**

*What they understand...*

- The death of someone contradicts a teens perception that they are invincible
- Have a more adult like understanding of death and the ability to understand abstract concepts
- Have their own personal view of death and ideas about what happens after someone dies

*How they grieve...*

- Reactions vary – some might show intense emotions of sadness, anger, shock, while others show little to no emotion at all
- Do not like to be identified as a "grieving person"
- Seek support and connection with their peers over family
- Might take on adult responsibilities around the home
- Like to appear in control and not in need of support

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Young Adulthood

- Brain Development and Growth Still Occurring into Mid-20s
- Revisit Childhood Losses and Grief Experience
- Redefining Identity, Family Connections, & Friendship Groups




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**Homicide Death**

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**Homicide Death**

- Cruel and Unjust
- Fear
- Rage
- Delayed Grief
- Media

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**Overdose Death**

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**Overdose Death**

- Shame and Stigma
- Secrecy
- Hindsight Bias
- Blame
- Guild and Responsibility
- The Toll

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**Long-Term Illness Death**

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**Long Term Illness Death**

- Caregiver Fatigue
- Relief & Guilt
- Caregiver Health
- Establishing New Routines
- Finding Purpose & Meaning

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### Death of a Spouse / Life Partner

- Loss of Companionship
- Loss of Shared Decision Making
- Return to Single Life
- Re-established Life Plan
- Parenting Alone
- Grief over your Child's Loss
- Why am I Still Here / Purpose
- Role Challenges
- Loss of Friendships




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### Death of a Sibling

- Loss of Life Companion
- Holder of Secrets / Confidant
- Birth Order
- Parent / Child Dynamics
- Adapting to New Relationship with Parent
- Living for Two People
- Living Up to Expectations




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### Death of a Parent

- Role Reversal
- Loss of Anchor
- Unfinished Business
- Identity Crisis
- Starting a New Chapter
- Keen Awareness of Immortality
- Existential Crisis




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### Death of a Child

- Loss of Future
- Legacy
- Shattered Dreams
- Shattered Assumptions
- Longing to be with Your Child
- Affront to the Natural Order of Life
- Unfairness
- Guilt & Regret

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### Session 3: Becoming Grief Informed - Ethical Considerations When Caring For Bereaved Populations

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### Vulnerable Population

- **Victimized** – Struggling with the Sense of Being a Victim
- **Maladjusted** – Feeling Like Something is Wrong with Them
- **Disempowered** – Not Knowing What To Do To Make it Better
- **Unsupported** – Feeling Like Noone Understands
- **Conflicted** – Receiving Mixed Messages from Family & Friends
- **Disenfranchised** – Believing that Their Experience is Not Valid
- **Exhausted** – Mental, Emotional, and Physical Functions are Taxed

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### Ethical Considerations in Bereavement Support

Grief is an Experience, not a Mental Illness

- Support vs. Treatment
- Companionship vs. Leading
- Understanding vs. Educating
- Empowerment vs. Dependence
- Options vs. Prescribing
- Perspective vs. Minimizing

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## The Evolution of a Bereavement Diagnosis

- **The DSM 5 - Removal of the Bereavement Exclusion** – refrain from diagnosing major depression in individuals within the first two months following a death.
- **Complicated Grief** – A proposed construct defining a theorized type of intense grief experience as a condition needing special treatment.
- **Prolonged Grief** – A proposed construct defining a theorized trajectory of a grief timeline as a condition needing special treatment.
- **DSM 5 - Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder for Further Study** – Frankenstein’s monster marrying of Complicated Grief & Prolonged Grief

Note: Prolonged Grief – Holly G. Prigerson, Complicated Grief – Katherine Shear

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## DSM-5-TR: Prolonged Grief Disorder

**Adult** - Death occurred at least 12 months ago  
**Child** – Death occurred 6 months ago

At least one of the following:

- Intense Yearning/longing for the deceased person.
- Preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased person.

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## Prolonged Grief Disorder

Since the death, at least **three** of the following symptoms have been present **most days** to a clinically significant degree. In addition, the symptoms have occurred **nearly every day** for at least **the last month**:

- Identity disruption
- Marked sense of disbelief about the death.
- Avoidance of reminders that the person is dead.
- Intense emotional pain.
- Difficulty reintegrating into one’s relationships and activities.
- Emotional numbness
- Feeling that life is meaningless
- Intense loneliness

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## Treatment, Diagnosis, and Medication

- *How Long Should It Take to Grieve? Psychiatry Has Come Up With an Answer.* - New York Times Article
- Intense Forms of Grief Classified as a Mental Disorder inflicting a narrow slice of the population who are incapacitated and unable to return to previous activities.
- Clinical trials for Naltrexone, a drug used to help treat addiction
- The Ability to Bill Insurance for the Treatment of Grief
- The Center for Complicated Grief has now been renamed The Center for Prolonged Grief Disorder

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## Pathologizing Grief – Why We Should Be Cautious

- Represents Grief as a Problem to be Fixed
- Stigmatizes Normal Grief Trajectories as a Disorder
- Ignores an Entire Body of Knowledge that Already Exists
- Misinforms the Public & Perpetuates Societal Myths about the Nature of Grief
- Is Dismissive to the Real-Life Experience of Bereaved People
- Creates a Context in which Normative Grief Reactions are (and will be) Stigmatized




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## Becoming Grief-Informed

Schuurman, D. L., & Mitchell, M. B. (2020). *Becoming grief-informed: A call to action.* Dougy Center: National Grief Center for Children & Families. [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)




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**Becoming Grief-Informed: Core Principles and Tenets of Practice**

- **Natural** – Loss is a normal, inevitable, and universal human experience. People have an innate capacity to adapt to loss and function healthily.
- **Nonpathological & Complex** – Grief is an adaptive, nonpathological response to loss. Grief is complex and complicated because people and relationships are complex and complicated.
- **Contextual** – Grief is not solely an individual experience; grief is interwoven in a sociocultural context, influenced by family, community, and other social systems. Acknowledging and addressing this can reduce disparities and promote equity and inclusion.
- **Disruptive** – Grief challenges our identity, relationships, beliefs, and assumptions about the world and our role in it.
- **Relational Connection & Perceived Support** – Healthy adaptation to loss is fostered by supportive relationships.

-Dr. Donna Schuurman & Dr. Monique Mitchell

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**Becoming Grief-Informed: Core Principles and Tenets of Practice**

- **Personal Empowerment & Agency** – Healthy adaptation to loss is fostered by personal empowerment and agency.
- **Safety** – Healthy adaptation to loss is fostered by psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual safety.
- **Person-Centered** – The duration, intensity, and experience of grief are unique for every individual.
- **Dynamic** – The dynamic nature of grief cannot be captured by stage, phase, or other prescriptive models. There are no universally acceptable or “correct” ways to grieve.
- **Nonfinite** – Loss is interwoven into our identity; therefore, the act of grieving is not a finite experience. Grief is ongoing.

-Dr. Donna Schuurman & Dr. Monique Mitchell

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“Much of what has been written in textbooks and articles throughout the history of thanatology fails to appropriately and adequately incorporate the narratives of grief from individuals and communities of various ethnicities, beliefs, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and other attributes which make people diverse, unique, and worthy of inclusion.”

-Donna L. Schuurman, EdD, FT and Monique B. Mitchell, PhD, FT

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### Grief (Pain) Longs to...

- Be Validated
- Be Understood
- Be Witnessed
- Be Acknowledged
- Be In Community
- Be Expressed
- Be Addressed



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Session 4: Models, Techniques, and Tools for Bereavement Support

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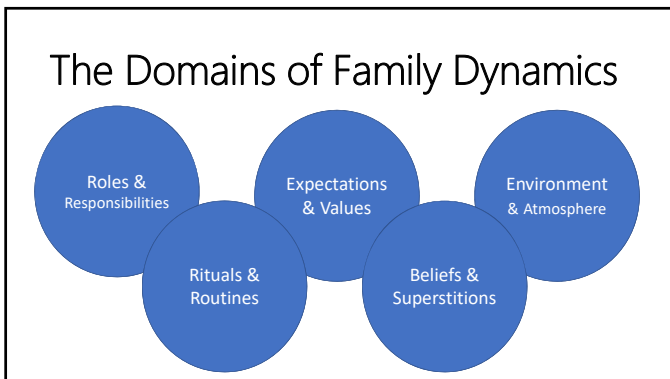
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### The Domains of Family Dynamics



- Roles & Responsibilities
- Expectations & Values
- Environment & Atmosphere
- Rituals & Routines
- Beliefs & Superstitions

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### Factors that Promote Health – Children & Teens

- Coping Skills
- Sense of Control
- Positive Self-Esteem
- Expression and Validation of Grief
- Positive Parent-Child Relationship

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### What Children Need

- Physical Activity
- Positive Relationships with Peers
- Positive Reinforcements of Self-Image
- Options & The Ability to Choose
- Boundaries & Accountability
- To Know What To Expect
- Predictability
- The Truth
- Positive Adult Relationships
- Nurture



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### What is Nurturing Behavior?

Validate Your Child's Feelings	Keep Your Voice Level Down
Build Trust	Promote Mutual Respect
Demonstrate Healthy Problem Solving	Encourage Your Child's Talents and Celebrate Their Successes
Love Unconditionally	Do Not Expect Perfection in Your Child or Yourself

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Benefits of Nurturing Parenting to Your Child

- Healthy Brain Development
- Greater Empathy and Compassion for Others
- A More Positive Self-Image
- Healthier Attachments and Conflict Resolution

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Family Adaptive Tasks of Grief

- Reestablishing Securing and Safety
- Restoring Routines
- Affirming and Maintaining Boundaries
- Adapting to New Roles & Responsibilities

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**Factors that Promote Health – Adults**

- Support System
- Access to Care
- Validation
- Self-Determination
- Reconstruction of Narrative
- Hope

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## Things to Avoid when Grieving

- Abuse of Alcohol or Drugs
- Extreme Isolation
- Consistent Inactivity
- Overeating or poor diet
- Undereating or lack of nutrition
- Lack of Exercise or Movement

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## Bereavement Support Content Areas

- Safety & Stabilization
- Perspective Building
- Problem Solving
- Meaning Making
- Continuing Bonds
- Grief Expression
- Life Skills and Coping
- Post Traumatic Growth

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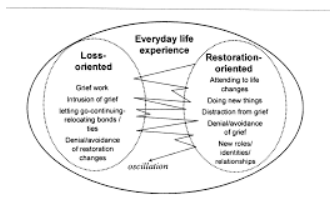
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## Dual Process Model

- Stroebe and Schut (1999)
- Argued that “grief work” alone is insufficient
- Find a balance between facing the reality of the loss and reengaging with life
- Oscillation between loss-orientation and restoration – orientation




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## Safety & Stabilization

- Established Safety Guidelines
- Routines and Rituals
- Tour, What to Expect, What We Do Here
- Trauma Sensitive
- Grief Informed
- Physical Health



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## Perspective Building

### Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

- *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990)
- Surveyed thousands across the world from various backgrounds
- Identified a state of consciousness he calls "flow"
- Also discovered the cycle that where you direct your attention impacts the type of person you become.

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What do you see?



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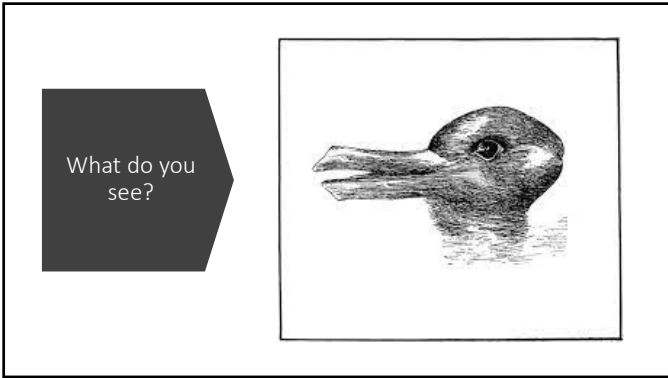
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Do you see a musician or a girl's face?

[WordProfessors](#)

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What do you see?



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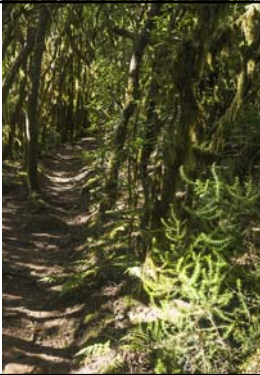
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**Perspective Building**

- Gestalt Techniques
- Imagining
- Before/After
- Then/Now
- Think, Feel, Do
- Personal Strengths
- Personality / Preference Activities
- Sand Tray Play



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Problem Solving

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**Problem Solving**

- Situation – Options – Possible Outcomes – Plan of Action – Evaluation
- Personal Choices Matter
- Dealing with Unhelpful People
- Home / Life Situations
- Relationships / Conflicts
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Struggle with School or Work
- Irritability / Emotional Struggles
- Intrusive / Invasive Thoughts




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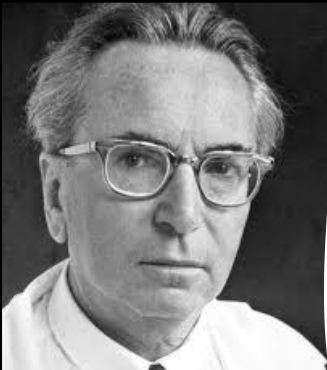
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**Meaning Making**  
**Victor Frankl**

- Wrote the book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946)
- Prisoner in Nazi death camps during WWII
- Frankl's concepts around finding meaning in the midst of suffering offer a context for discussions around coping with loss, narrative retelling, and meaning reconstruction

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Meaning in Life

- Creativity**- by creating a work or doing a deed
- Experiencing**-something or encountering someone
- Control of Attitude**- by the attitude we take towards unavoidable suffering

Frankl, V. E. (1984). Man's search for meaning (Revised and updated). New York: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books.

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**Meaning Making**

- Expressing the "Why"
- Strong Relationships
- Creative Outlets
- Helping / Supporting Others
- Make Believe Play
- Telling Your Story
- Reconstructing the Narrative




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**Continuing Bonds**

**Phyllis Silverman**

- Together with J. William Worden, led the Harvard Child Bereavement Study
- Viewed grief as a transitional process rather than a pathology
- Instrumental in developing the concept of "Continuing Bonds"

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### Continuing Bonds

- Stories about Their Person
- Sharing Pictures of Their Person
- Linking Objects
- Evoking Memories
- Good Memories / Bad Memories
- Unfinished Business
- Letter Writing
- Ongoing Conversations

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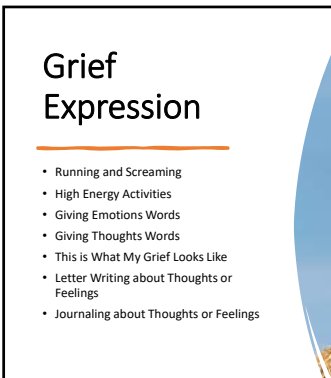
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### Grief Expression

- Running and Screaming
- High Energy Activities
- Giving Emotions Words
- Giving Thoughts Words
- This is What My Grief Looks Like
- Letter Writing about Thoughts or Feelings
- Journaling about Thoughts or Feelings

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### Life Skills & Healthy Coping

- Self-Regulation
- Mindfulness
- Nature & Outdoors
- Healthy Friendships
- Identifying Your Support System
- Caring, Safe Adults
- Healthy Coping Behaviors / Activities
- Healthy Expression

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Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun

Pioneered and coined the phrase Posttraumatic Growth

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Crisis / Tragedy / Death



Shattered Assumptions



Struggle with the Crisis



Post-Traumatic Growth



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### Domains of Post-Traumatic Growth

Appreciation of Life

Relationships with Others

Personal Strength

Spiritual Change

New Possibilities in Life

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### Activities that Foster Post-Traumatic Growth

- Rumination & Struggle with Assumptive World
- Story Telling
- Reconstructing the Narrative
- Continuing Bonds
- Hearing Other's Stories and Identifying with Them
- Balanced by Nurture

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### Posttraumatic Growth vs Resilience

#### Post-Traumatic Growth

- Transformation as a result of struggle in trauma's aftermath.
- There is a shift in the normative developmental trajectory due to ongoing distress and rumination (both intrusive and deliberate)
- Land in a different place as a result of the struggle.

#### Resilience

- Positive adaptation despite significant life adversity.
- Follows a normative developmental trajectory.
- Appear unaffected in spite of adversity.

NOTE: Kilmer, et al

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### Bereavement Support Content Areas

- Safety & Stabilization
- Perspective Building
- Problem Solving
- Meaning Making
- Continuing Bonds
- Grief Expression
- Life Skills and Coping
- Post Traumatic Growth

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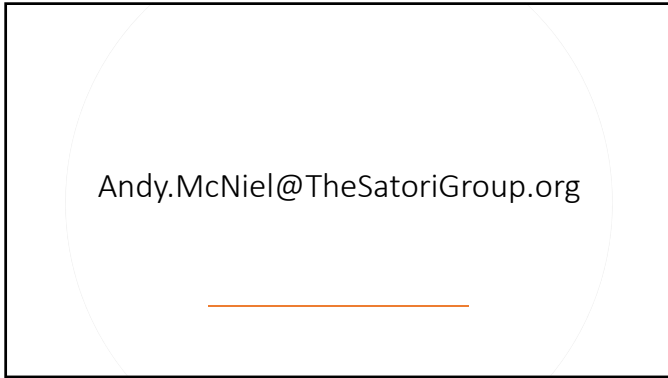
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