

Understanding Grief

...in the Workplace

HAMILTON'S ACADEMY OF GRIEF & LOSS
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Learning Objectives

- ▶ Analyze early psychological theories on grief and how that impacts views of grief in present day context.
- ▶ Examine what grief is and the factors that impact grief.
- ▶ Determine the layers added to grief when occurring in the workplace.
- ▶ Identify barriers to implementing care for wellbeing to mitigate burnout.

Early Psychological Theories on Grief

Sigmund Freud (1917)

Grief was the process of adjusting to the reality of loss thereby enabling them to disengage from the deceased and to reinvest in new relationships.

Erich Lindemann (1940's)

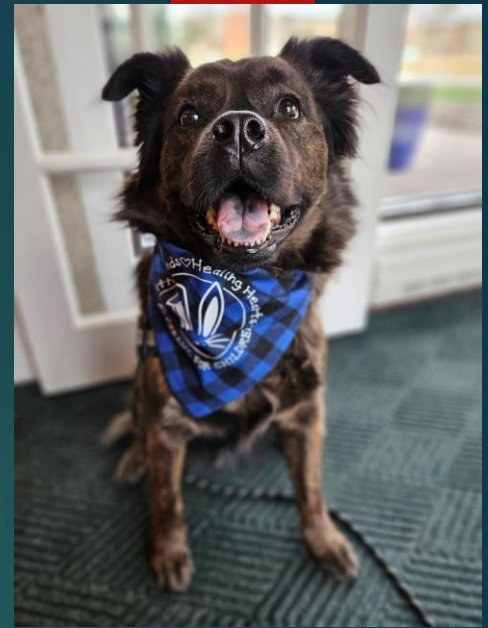
Earliest significant research revealing the long term impact of grief and trauma. Worked with grieving survivors of the Cocoanut Grove Night Club Fire – Boston, MA

- Established some common symptoms of grief
- Introduced the concept of grief work

John Bowlby's Theory on Attachment (1961)

Grief is an instinctive universal response to separation. Suggests that grief is a predictable orderly pattern of responses to death.

- The initial shock, resulting in numbness that can last for days leading to intense grief.
- Viewed suppressed and unresolved (unending grief) as pathological.

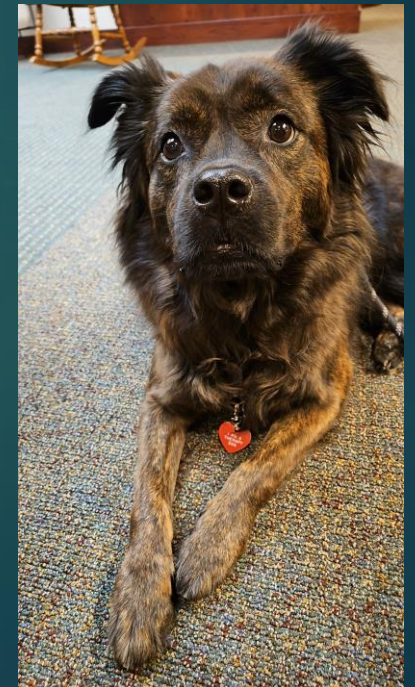


Tasks of Mourning - William Worden (1980)

- Grief is a process and not a state
- Four overlapping tasks
- Work through the emotional pain of their loss while at the same time adjusting to changes in their new life
- Complete when the bereaved has integrated the loss into their life and let go of attachments to the deceased allowing to re-invest in the present and future (has since been modified to continue the bond)

Two-Track Model of Bereavement - Simon Shimshon Rubin (1981)

- Focused on both:
 - How people are functioning
 - Track 1 – How is the biopsychosocial function?
 - Their relationship to the deceased
 - Track 2 – What is the nature of the relationship with the deceased?



Theresa Rando's Six R Processes of Mourning (1991)

- Grief is an involuntary reaction to the loss vs. mourning is an ongoing, active process of moving toward accommodation.
- Three phases of mourning – *Avoidance, Confrontation, and Accommodation*

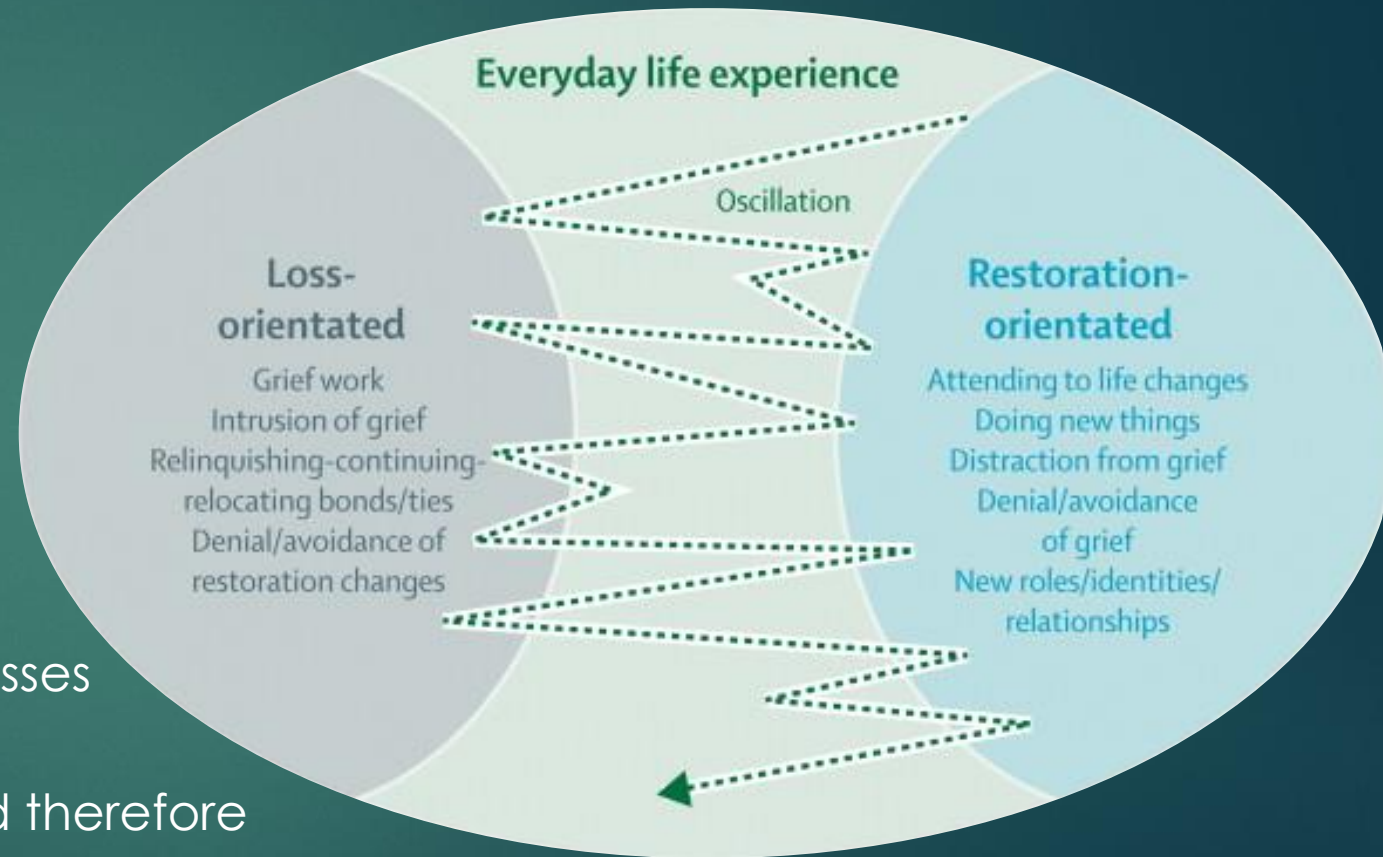


R Processes:

- Recognize the loss – *Avoidance Phase*
- React to the separation – *Confrontation Phase*
- Recollect and re-experience the deceased and the relationship – *Confrontation Phase*
- Relinquish old attachments to the deceased & the old assumptive world – *Confrontation Phase*
- Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old world – *Accommodation*
- Reinvest – *Accommodation phase*

Dual Process Model - Stroebe and Schut (1995, 1996)

- Avoiding grief can be both helpful and detrimental – depending on the circumstances
- Introduces a concept of oscillation between coping skills
- Dynamic process
 - Loss-oriented: focusing on the person who died
 - Restoration-oriented: avoiding that focus, helps to deal with secondary losses
- Taking time off from the pain of grief and therefore giving the bereaved the ability to better cope



Continuing Bonds - Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1997)

- The bereaved do not need to forget and leave the deceased behind, but rather can integrate them into their future lives.
- No longer viewed as maladaptive to the grieving process
- Non-western world considers this 'caring for the dead'
- The purpose of grieving is instead to maintain a continued bond with the deceased, in addition to all the other relationships in their lives.



Model of Adaptive Grieving Dynamics - C.D. Bagney Darian (2014)

- Most people naturally adapt to loss by engaging in the following four dynamics in a balanced way.
 - Pillar One: Adaptive Lamenting
 - Distressful, painful responses from the loss and the need to express and process
 - Pillar Two: Adaptive Heartening
 - Experiencing gratifying, uplifting and pleasurable responses in the midst of grief
 - Pillar Three: Adaptive Integrating
 - Assimilating the internal and external changes as a result of the loss
 - Pillar Four: Adaptive Tempering
 - Avoiding chronic attempts to integrate changed realities that overwhelm their resources and capacities. A need for boundaries and self-care to avoid grief burn out.

Grief: The “Five Letter Word”?

- ▶ Grief is the human response to any significant loss in our lives
 - ▶ Life is a series of transitions and losses
 - ▶ Grief reactions are highly individual
- ▶ Impacts all aspects of our being
 - ▶ Emotional
 - ▶ Physical
 - ▶ Psychological
 - ▶ Behavioral
 - ▶ Spiritual
 - ▶ Relational



Factors that Impact Grief

- ▶ Type of Loss – family member, best friend, pet, client
- ▶ Relationship with the deceased – close, distant, unresolved issues?
- ▶ Age of the person who died and the age of the child grieving
- ▶ Grief Patterns in our family of origin
- ▶ Circumstances of the death
- ▶ Support system
- ▶ Spiritual/cultural beliefs
- ▶ Personality and gender
- ▶ Other life circumstances that are happening when the loss occurs

Different Kinds of Grief?

- ▶ Anticipatory Grief
- ▶ Cumulative Grief
- ▶ Collective Loss
- ▶ Disenfranchised Grief
- ▶ Ambiguous Loss
- ▶ Suffocated Grief
- ▶ Re-grief



Grief in the workplace...what makes it different?

- Disenfranchised Grief – unacknowledged loss by society or those around you
- Finding someone deceased at their home – could be traumatic for some
 - How might that impact how you care for others going forward?
 - How do you work through the natural fear you might have?
- Bereavement Leave is only for certain losses
 - Death of a Pet, can have just as much of an impact as a human relative
- Missing rituals – if you are unable to attend funeral services, or there aren't any
- May not feel entitled to grieve the loss
 - Acknowledgement
 - Giving yourself permission for feeling however you are feeling
- Brings up grief from other losses

Supporting Grief in the Workplace

- Grief can affect productivity
 - Low energy, difficulty concentrating, emotional exhaustion, mood swings
 - May be irritable or tearful
- Grieving workers have 3 basic needs in order to process their loss and return to productivity:
 - Time
 - Flexibility
 - Support
- What accommodations can be made?



Tips for Work Grief...

- Allow yourself time to grieve and to feel whatever emotions you are having
- Be aware of situations that will be more challenging for you
- Try for an emotional balance
- Utilize your support system at work
- Find ways to unplug
- Acknowledge the importance of taking care of you
- Be intentional about balancing the stress of your work with positive time



Supportive Actions in Grief: Acts of Emotional Caring

(Cacciatore J., Thieleman K., Fretts R., Jackson LB., 2021)

Emotional Support – *listening, letting them share their story, validating how they feel, etc.*

Instrumental Support – *practical things you can offer help with...lawncare, taking the kids to school, picking up groceries, etc.*

Informational – *gathering information, resources for them, etc.*

Appraisal – *Support group, people who are also grieving and can reflect back to you*



HOW TO HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND

Remember...

- ▶ All grief is valid. And not all grief is the same.
 - ▶ It is not the pain Olympics.
 - ▶ We don't have to compare our losses to give ourselves and others compassion. - Concept from Megan Devine, *Refuge in Grief*
- ▶ Everyone grieves differently and what they need is different. We can't assume what worked for us works for them. Or what worked before will work for this loss.
- ▶ You will not have the right words to "fix it". And your words do have impact. But don't let fear of saying the wrong thing keep you from saying anything at all. A well intentioned, "I am so sorry and I am thinking about you" means so much. And keep checking in over time!



From webcomic, "Gunshow" by KC Green

Why Self-Care Can Feel Hard...

- Push through it mentality – we glorify productivity
 - Busyness culture, hustle culture, urgency culture...
- Feeling guilty for doing it
- Pressure to do it, it feels like one more thing on the to do list
- Requires a relationship with our own feelings – we don't do that well

- Negativity bias – always set high goals that weren't realistic so you'll just fail at it again.
- Shame – you deserve the same compassion you give freely to others
- Confusing self indulgence with self-care

What Self-Care Really is...

- Being proactive about our health & well-being
- Consciously engaging in practices that benefit (not add additional harm) to our well-being
- Involves redefining our relationship with our feelings & learning to respect them. *(Beverly Hills Therapy Group, 2024)*
- Taking care of ourselves ensures our mental, physical and emotional health are in harmony
- Means understanding & responding to our own needs – physical, emotional & mental.
- Listening to our feelings, respecting our limits, and giving ourselves the compassion. *(Saber, 2024)*



We are more capable of our jobs, and caring for others when we are actually caring for ourselves!

T.A.C.O.C.A.T

Taking Awesome Care of Ourselves: + Cats Are Terrific



T.A.C.O Self-Care Plan by Carrie A. Bauer, LBSW- 2017.
Adapted to T.A.C.O.C.A.T. by Buffy Peters, September 2017.

Meat/Beans:

the supportive people in your life

Tomatoes:

the ways you care for your mind

Cheese:

the ways you care for your body

Salsa:

the ways you care for your spirit

Lettuce:

goals you have for yourself

CATS!!

the things you are grateful for



What can you do
to incorporate
more care for
yourself today?

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Resources For Grief in the Workplace

<https://hospicefoundation.org/grief-in-the-workplace/>

<https://www.workplaceoptions.com/blog/when-grief-goes-unacknowledged-and-how-it-affects-the-workplace/>

<https://static.cigna.com/assets/chcp/pdf/resourceLibrary/behavioral/COVID-19-coronavirus-understanding-grief.pdf>

<https://bereavementcenter.org/project/understanding-grief-in-the-workplace/>

Additional Resources

Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss

www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com

www.hamiltonsfuneralhome.com/academy-of-grief-and-loss/grief-loss-resources

www.hamiltonsfuneralhome.com/academy-of-grief-and-loss/community-resource-booklet

HealGrief/Actively Moving Forward (AMF)

www.HealGrief.org

- App that includes workshops, book club, virtual support groups and more!

Speaking Grief

www.speakinggrief.org

- Documentary and Resources

What's Your Grief

Whatsyourgrief.com

Contact
Us!!

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