

Sudden Death Bereavement & Stress

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Objectives

- Describe the main reactions to bad news;
- Understand the feelings experienced by the bereaved;
- Demonstrate the key aspects of bereavement theory;
- Appreciate why people may react differently to bad news;
- Recognise the possible onset of stress and how to alleviate negative affects.



Definitions

- Loss: to be deprived of a person (especially a close relative by death), hopes or dreams.
- Bereavement: the situation of anyone who has lost a person to whom they are attached
- Grief: the psychological and emotional reactions to bereavement

Common Reactions to Grief



- **Physical:** tension, sleep disturbances, weight & appetite change
- **Emotional:** sadness, guilt, anger, denial, feeling lost, hopelessness & helplessness
- **Behavioural:** searching, disorientation, blaming others, withdrawn, activity & crying

The Stages of Grief

- Kubler Ross 1969 5 stages
- Denial & Isolation
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
- Criticised for being too dogmatic

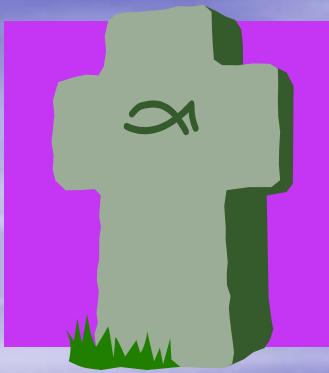
The Phases of Grief

- Colin Murray- Parkes 1989
- Numbness & Blunting
- Pining & Yearning – *the pangs of grief*
- Disorganisation & Despair
- Reorganisation & Recovery

- *The pangs of grief stay forever and return without warning*

Determinants of grief

- **Antecedents -** childhood experiences, relationship to the deceased or mental health
- **Concurrent –** mode of death, age & personality, social & cultural background
- **Subsequent –** isolation, other stresses & options open to the bereaved



Sudden Death

- “Sudden death is well recognised as one of the most traumatic crisis events that can be experienced.”
- When a death is not expected and the bereaved are not prepared for the loss.
- Untimely/sudden death can result in complicated grief being experienced.
- Evidence demonstrates that Sudden death can be damaging to the bereaved.

Problems with Sudden Death

- **There is no time for anticipatory grief**
- **There is a sense of unreality**
- **There is likely to be much guilt & anger**
- **There is often a sense of unfinished business**

The Iceberg of Grief

Those who are grieving present a brave face to the outside world, while what is really going on inside them is hidden beneath the surface.




Sue Ryder Care 

Illustration adapted from Gamlin's 'Iceberg of Grief'
Gamlin R & Kinghorn S (1995) "Using hope to cope with loss & stress"
Nursing Standard, 9(48):33-34

“the bereaved need to feel the pain of their loss, and be able to express it freely”

“there is no way round grief, but there is a way through it”

“when faced with a person who has been newly bereaved, they need a befriender, who has two ears and one tongue!”

“if in doubt, say nowt!”



Blocks to Listening

- Mind Reading -** Trying to figure out what the other person is thinking and feeling
- Rehearsing -** Giving too much attention to the preparation and delivery of your next comment.
- Filtering -** Listening to some parts and not others
- Judging -** Not listening to what they say, as you have already judged them.
- Dreaming -** Half listening while something the person says triggers off a chain of associations of your own
- Advising -** Being the great problem-solver.
- Being Right -** Going to any lengths to avoid being wrong.
- Derailing -** Changing the subject suddenly.

Pastoral First Aid

- *In the pre-hospital environment do 'Pastoral First Aid' to minimise the level of distress*
- Acknowledge the persons right to be distressed.
- Be there.
- Give comfort and support.
- Information catharsis.

Recognising Stress

- **Physical Signs:** A pounding heart, tightness of chest, chest pains, sweaty palms, aching muscles
- **Emotional Signs:** Irritable, angry, depressed, jealous, restless, anxious, Hyper alert, Guilt, Panic
- **Behavioural signs:** Withdrawn/not socialising, Increased alcohol or nicotine Under or over eating. Accident prone Impatient, aggressive, compulsive No time for leisure activities.

Managing Stress

In the pre-hospital environment, remember:

“You are not dealing with difficult people in normal situations, you are dealing with normal people in difficult situations...”

‘If you are unable to change the cause of stress, look at how you can change the way you deal with it.’

WE NEED TO LOOK AFTER OURSELVES!

Looking After Ourselves

- To learn about our own reactions. It can help to reflect on our own losses to ensure that we don't load unfinished grief onto others.
- To remember that we cannot take away a family's grief but we can help support them and listen.
- To have good colleagues to share with and seek support, advice & supervision.
- Look after yourself, learn to say "No" sometimes.
- Relaxation/exercise.
- Work/life balance.



A blue sky with light clouds over a blue ocean with a sun reflection.

Questions?