Understanding the Journey: A perspective on the process of dealing with Loss and Trauma

- Objectives:
  - Appreciate the unique nature of the response to loss or trauma for each person
  - Understand the complex nature of triggers of feelings of loss and trauma
  - Develop strategies to help patients cope with loss and trauma

- Grief is an individual experience that we go through together

- It is a process and not just about the event
- The experience is diverse and unpredictable, comparisons usually are not helpful
- Need to choose to be active rather than passive and helping others can help you
- There is no one way to do it, What helps one person may be a problem for another
- Complicated grief is characterized by intense longing, intrusive preoccupation with the circumstances of the loss, self-blame, avoidance of thoughts or memories of the deceased avoidance of previously shared activities, and inadequate adaptation to the loss. (22,30,31)

- The experience is different though childhood and adolescence. (47) Sometimes people have to revisit how they feel repeatedly as they grow older and gain a deeper understanding
  - Birth to 6 years: the young can understand death; don’t grasp irreversibility; its more like going away, “in the sky”. Result is more like separation anxiety. Children may grieve intensely and take a break; studies use drawing to understand perceptions (12)
  - 7 to 12 years: this age groups struggles more than we think, putting words to emotions is difficult, stress can bring people together or push them apart
  - Teenagers: Grief reactions can be complicated like adults (13); lots of risk including withdrawl from school (15); focus on peers for support which can help or hurt (17), a much more public process which leads to less intimacy, they may be more active than they tell you, self-esteem is a protective factor (17,20)
• Qualities of the experience that can impact grief (17)
  o Openness(51,52), “Strength”, Alone or supported(45), Active versus passive, Public nature
  o Unexpected or expected, Traumatic or peaceful
  o Feeling responsible: Guilt (21) and shame; Blame is a critical element to address
  o Not all loss involves death (19, 47), It has a compounding nature

• Triggers of emotional trauma
  o Unique, Unpredictable, all around us, involving ordinary and special events
  o One person’s coping mechanism can be a trigger for another’s grief
  o Martin Seligman, 3 P’s you feel: Personalization: we are at fault, Pervasiveness: the event will affect all areas of our life, Permanence: the event will last forever (26)

• The work to do:
  o Wrestle with the past, Be present, Look to the future in a positive way
    ▪ Talk as you are ready, No time table but avoid being stagnant
    ▪ Be tolerant with yourself and others, Don’t let the event or grief define you
    ▪ Hard to lean on each other because you do not want to be a burden
    ▪ Worden’s tasks of mourning for children and adolescents: (47,48)
      • Accepting the reality of the loss (developmental stage/age of the child)
      • Working through the pain and emotional aspects of grief
      • Adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing
      • Finding ways to relocate the deceased person within one’s life and to memorialize the person
  o What do we do to help? (32, 35, 40, 41, 42)
    ▪ Show compassion: “I am there with you”
    ▪ Avoidance can be worse than doing or saying the wrong thing; Ask
    ▪ Don’t hide or suppress your emotions, Model with authenticity
    ▪ Maintain routines as normally as possible, Give permission to grieve
    ▪ Peer support (37,38, 39)
    ▪ Exploring and confirming that children understand what has occurred and what death means (43)
    ▪ Helping to identify reactions such as guilt, fear, worry, or depressive symptoms that suggest the need for further discussion or services (43)
    ▪ Providing reassurance to children who become concerned about their own health or those of family members (43)
    ▪ Offering support to grieving children and their families to minimize their distress and accelerate their adjustment (43)
    ▪ Informing families about local resources that can provide additional assistance (43, 44)
    ▪ Offering advice on funeral attendance of children (43)
    ▪ Having support to ask the questions, is more important than finding clear and specific answers. (44)
• How to cope (16, 17,34,36)
  o Talking, writing, drawing when ready (34)
  o Faith(59), Family, Friends: Ask for help; know there is a place to go, help others (46)
  o Fun: allow ourselves to be happy and others can see that, find joy, peace
  o Function: self-confidence, Be grateful, Forgive(53), recognize impact of finances/physical assistance (33)
• Acceptance
  o What does it mean?
  o Traditional: Kubler-Ross: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance (3)
  o Thinking of this as states not stages: No order, changing states over time, finding both cognitive and emotional acceptance (4)
  o There is pain because there was love
  o Be aware of how life is different, do not be stagnant
  o Need for solitude at times but other times you need a push
• Build resilience in kids (27,54)
  o Reframe difficult events; Give support
  o Core beliefs a child needs to be resilient
    ▪ Positive sense of self
    ▪ Have some control over your life
    ▪ Desire to succeed and set goals
    ▪ You can learn from failure: you are not fixed, you can grow
    ▪ Self-control/self-regulation
    ▪ Persistence
    ▪ Willing to seek and accept support
  o Help them remember, Nostalgia (Return to pain) makes you happier
  o New family unit wholeness, do new fun things together
• Post Traumatic Growth
  o Kids 8-18: 39% Resilient, 35% Prolonged Grief, 26% PTSD/Prolonged Grief (18)
  o Live
  o Finding personal strength, seeing the positive in the world (16), forming deeper relationships, discovering more meaning in life (59), seeing new possibilities
  o Negative self-talk can deepen negative emotions, Avoid getting stuck in why (55, 58)
  o Don’t let helping others be a way to avoid dealing with your own issues (57)
  o Don’t feel guilty about feeling better (56)
  o Store positive memories
  o Tools
    ▪ Grief letter
    ▪ Journaling
    ▪ Group or individual counseling
    ▪ Graded exposure
• Resources
  o [www.allianceofhope.org](https://www.allianceofhope.org)
  o [https://www.dougy.org/](https://www.dougy.org/)
  o Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy. Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant 2017
  o The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice. Lawrence Calhoun, Richard Tedeschi 2006
  o Center for Complicated Grief at the Columbia University School of Social Work ([www.complicatedgrief.org](https://www.complicatedgrief.org))
  o Compassionate Friends network ([www.compassionatefriends.org](https://www.compassionatefriends.org))
  o The Dougy Center/The National Center for Grieving Children & Families ([www.dougy.org](https://www.dougy.org))
  o National Alliance for Grieving Children ([https://childrengrieve.org](https://childrengrieve.org))
  o Olivia’s House ([www.Oliviashouse.org](https://www.Oliviashouse.org))
  o Winston’s Wish ([www.winstonswish.org.uk](https://www.winstonswish.org.uk)—UK charity for bereaved children
  o [www.Helpwithgrief.org](https://www.Helpwithgrief.org)
  o [www.Griefnet.org](https://www.Griefnet.org)
  o [www.Centerforloss.com](https://www.Centerforloss.com)
  o Helping Adolescents Cope With Loss, edited by Kenneth J. Doka and Amy S. Tucci, was published as a companion book to the 21st Annual LIVING WITH GRIEF National Bereavement Conference sponsored by the Hospice Foundation of America in April 2014.

• Measurement tools (61)
  o Some clinical instruments used in adult grief assessments
    ▪ Brief Grief Questionnaire
    ▪ Inventory of Complicated Grief
    ▪ Hogan Grief Inventory
    ▪ Texas Revised Inventory of Grief
Grief Experiences


How we can help


35) Feigelman W, Sanford RL, Cerel J. Do Primary Care Physicians Help the Bereaved With Their Suicide Losses: Loss Survivor Perceptions of Helpfulness From Physicians. OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying 0(0) 1–14.

**Resilience and Post Traumatic Growth**


**Measurement tools**