

Compassion in Crisis: Supporting Those Affected by Loss

Skyler Conway MS CCISM
NH DHHS Disaster
Behavioral Health
Coordinator

October 2024

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Learn the types and stages of grief.
- ▶ Recognize individual grief responses.
- ▶ Learn ways to offer support and guidance to individuals experiencing grief and loss.

Trauma and Grief

Trauma and grief are related but distinct experiences:

- ▶ Grief is a normal reaction to loss, with symptoms diminishing over time.
- ▶ Trauma is a disabling reaction that can block the grieving process and disrupt your life.
- ▶ Traumatic grief occurs after an abrupt, unexpected loss, and it combines mourning with trauma.
- ▶ Traumatic loss can lead to intense emotions, intrusive mental images, and shattered lives.
- ▶ Trauma recovery involves navigating stages like grief after a death.

Trauma and Grief

GRIEF vs. TRAUMA	
THE EFFECTS OF GRIEF	THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA
Sadness is the dominant emotion.	Terror is the dominant emotion.
Grief feels real.	Trauma feels unreal.
Talking about grief can help.	Talking about trauma is difficult or impossible.
Pain is related to the loss.	Pain involves not just loss but terror, helplessness, and fear.
Anger is nonviolent.	Anger often involves violence towards yourself or others.
Guilt involves unfinished emotional business with the deceased.	Guilt includes self-blame for what happened or thoughts that it should have been you who was harmed.
Your self-image and confidence generally remain intact.	Your self-image and confidence are distorted and undermined.
You dream about the person you lost.	You dream about yourself in danger.
Symptoms lessen naturally over time.	Untreated, symptoms may get worse.

Adapted from the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, <http://www.tlcinst.org/tlc.html>

Talking About Death is..

~~Weird~~

~~Taboo~~

~~Bad Luck~~

~~Morbid~~

a part of life.

Definitions

- ▶ Bereavement: the state of having had a loved one die.
- ▶ Grief: the emotion we feel as a result of loss.
- ▶ Mourning: what we do to express our grief.

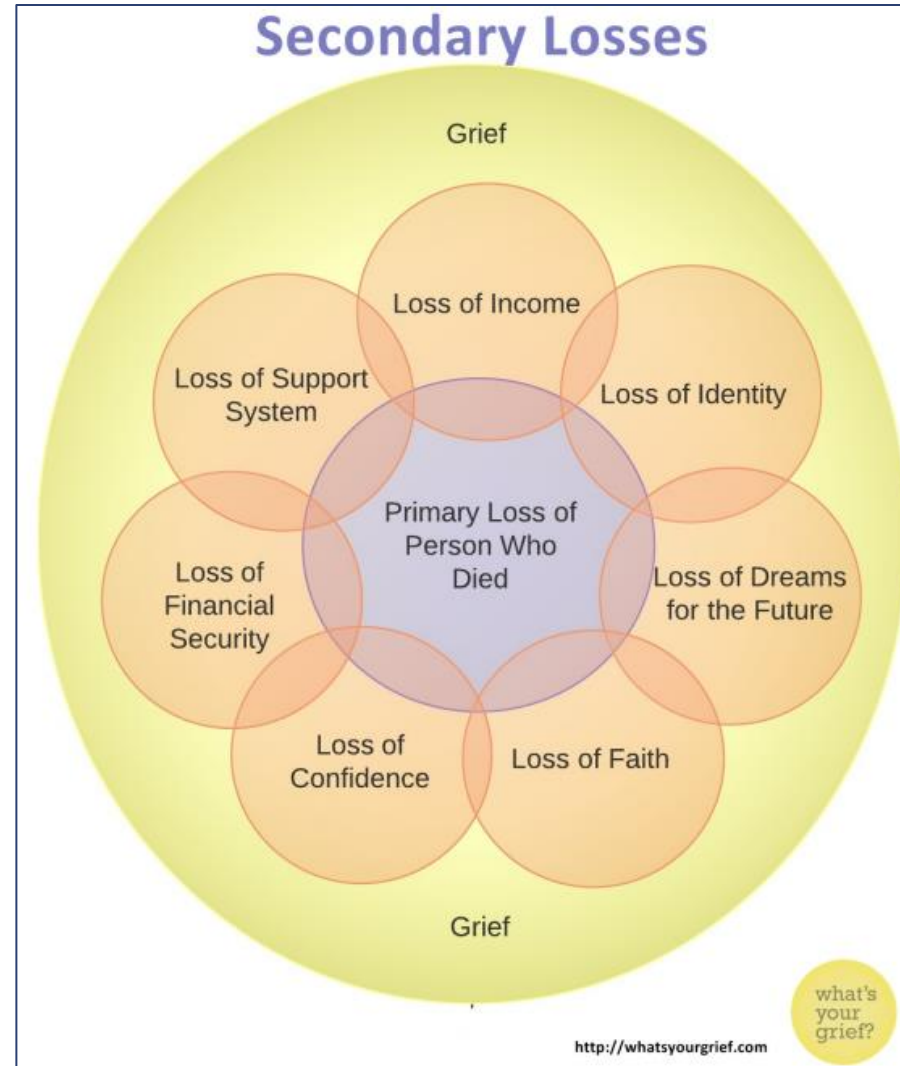
Factors Influencing Grief

- ▶ Relationship with person who has died/thing which has been lost
- ▶ Age of person grieving/current health status
- ▶ Previous experience of grief
- ▶ Cultural background
- ▶ Belief system
- ▶ Financial situation
- ▶ Knowledge around cause of death/loss
- ▶ Personality
- ▶ Concurrent losses/changes occurring

Factors Influencing Grief

- ▶ Support systems – family/friends/community
- ▶ Cause of death (expected or not expected)
- ▶ Expectation of death
- ▶ Recognition of loss by others (disenfranchised grief)
- ▶ Social ‘acceptability’ of cause of death
- ▶ Social ‘acceptability’ of relationship of bereaved to deceased
- ▶ Ability to communicate feelings
- ▶ Language and developmental levels

Primary vs. Secondary Losses



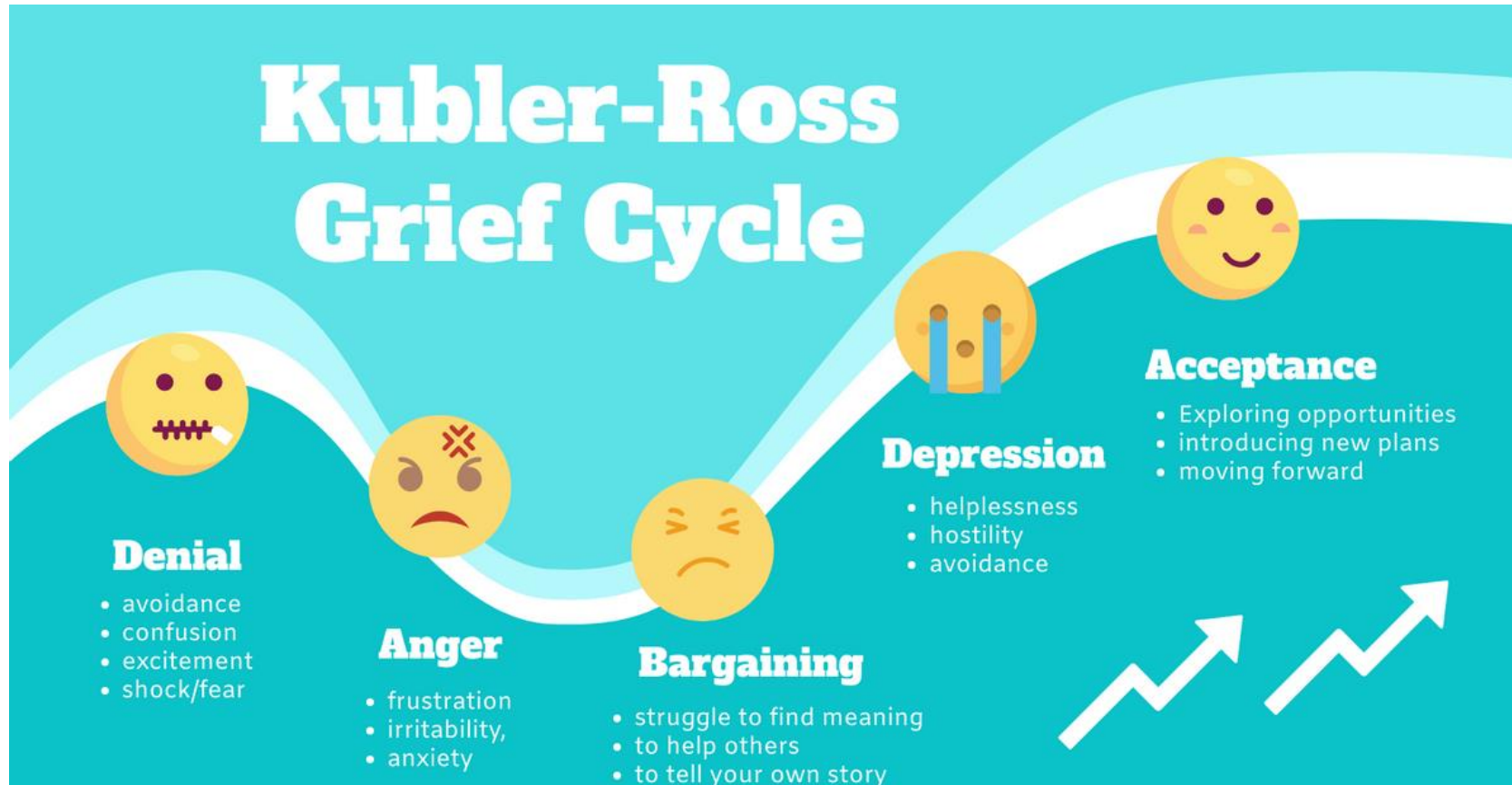
Types of Grief

- ▶ **Disenfranchised Grief:** A death/loss that cannot be socially sanctioned, openly acknowledged or publicly mourned
- ▶ **Anticipatory Grief:** A grief reaction that occurs before an impending death/loss
- ▶ **Ambiguous Loss:** A death/loss that occurs without closure or understanding

Types of Grief

- ▶ **Traumatic Bereavement:** The state of having experienced a death which is associated with symptoms of trauma brought about by the circumstances of the death
- ▶ **Complicated Grief:** Intensity of symptoms is heightened and their duration prolonged
 - Complications can include troubling thoughts, problematic behaviors or inability to adequately regulate emotions

Grief Theories



Grief Theories



Grief Theories

TEAR Model of Grief



Symptoms of Grief

- ▶ Shock
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Guilt
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Numbness/Withdrawal
- ▶ Low mood
- ▶ Relief
- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ Feeling of being lost
- ▶ Conflicting emotions

How can you help?

- ▶ Be Still & Present (Compassionate Presence)
- ▶ Bear Witness
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Validate
- ▶ Nurture expression & Empower choice
 - Mild or Intense
 - Visible or Invisible
 - Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral



How can you help?

- ▶ Reduce pressure to be “Strong”
- ▶ Promote “Continuing Bonds” via Rituals/Memorials
- ▶ Reminiscence
- ▶ Validate secondary or hidden losses
 - Changed roles
 - New responsibilities
- ▶ Disenfranchised Grief (ignored or denied rights to feelings)



What not to say...

- ▶ It is time to move on
- ▶ Everything happens for a reason
- ▶ Are you over it yet? She's been gone a long time
- ▶ Others have it worse than you
- ▶ I thought you would be more upset
- ▶ You must be strong
- ▶ Why are you still crying?
- ▶ They wouldn't want you to be so sad

What not to say...

- ▶ They wouldn't want you to be so sad
- ▶ Heaven needed another angel
- ▶ I know just how you feel
- ▶ Don't cry in front of the children
- ▶ You are still young; you can always remarry
- ▶ God will never give you more than you can handle
- ▶ You do have other children
- ▶ Anything that starts with "at least..."

Thank You!

Look for the helpers. You will
always find people who are helping.

Fred Rogers

quote fancy

Contact Information

Skyler Conway, MS CCISM

Disaster Behavioral Health Coordinator

Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services

Department of Health and Human Services

Office: 603-271-9460

Cell: 603-573-8212

Skyler.F.Conway@dhhs.nh.gov

Cassie McNelly

Disaster Behavioral Health Liaison

Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

Division of Public Health Services

NH Department of Health and Human Services

Cell: 603-731-9238

Cassie.L.Mcnelly@dhhs.nh.gov