When Tragedy Strikes
Supporting Survivors
After Sudden Loss

Kentucky's 2007
Victims Assistance Conference

Presented by
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Wednesday, March 28, 2007
10:00 am – 11:15 am

Our Objectives

1. Describe factors that influence grief due to a sudden violent death
2. Identify effective ways to provide support after a sudden violent death

Most Upsetting Incidents

- Death
- Personally threatening situation
- Knowing the victim
- Grotesque sights and sounds

Rubel, B. (2004). *Death, Dying and Bereavement: Providing compassion during a time of need.* MA: Western Schools.

When Homicide Survivors First Learn Loved One is Dead

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Numbness
- Anger
- Anxiety

Redmond, L. (1989). *Surviving: When Someone You Love Was Murdered*. Clearwater, FL: Psychological Consultation and Education Services, Inc.

Murdered Children

- Intense anger
- Investigations
- Safety
- Trust

Wickie, S.K. & Marwit, S.J. (2000-2001), Assumptive world views and the grief reactions of parents of murdered children. Omega, 42, 101-113.

Violent Death of Child

- Investigations
- Triggers
- Death Scene
- Inadequate Support
- Coping with Guilt

Murphy, S.A., Gupta, A.D., Cain, K.C.,Johnson, L.C., Lohan, J., Wu, L., and Mekwa,J. (1999). Changes in parents' mental distress after violent death of an adolescent or young Adult child: A longitudinal prospective analysis. Death Studies, 23:129-159.

Fatal Car Crash

- Suddenness
- Untimely, Premature Death
- Avoidable or Preventable
- Violent, Mutilating Injuries

Stewart, A.E. (1999). Complicated Bereavement and Posttraumatic stress disorder following fatal car crashes: Recommendations for death notification practice, *Death Studies, 23*: 289-321.

Traumatic Event

Experiencing, witnessing or confronting actual or threatened death,
serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of oneself or other people
(DSM-IV text revision; APA, 2000)

Response to Event: Intense fear, helplessness, or horror
(child -must involve disorganized or agitated behavior)

American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders

Traumatic Stress

Emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological experience of individuals who are exposed to, or who witness event that overwhelms coping and problem- solving abilities.

Traumatic Stress:
- disables people
- causes disease
- precipitates mental disorders
- leads to substance abuse
- destroys relationships and families.

- Traumatic stress reactions may lead to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Lerner, M.D. & Shelton, R.S. (2001). Acute traumatic stress management

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

Grief:
Process of cognitive, behavioral, physical, social, and spiritual reactions to the perception of loss

Bereavement:
State of having suffered a loss

Mourning:
Cultural behaviors and practices that helps bereaved adapt to loss and express their grief during a certain period of time

Palette of Grief®

Traumatic Grief

Criterion A:
3 of 4 symptoms of separation distress below:

1. Intrusive thoughts about deceased
2. Yearning for deceased
3. Searching for deceased
4. Loneliness as a result of death

Prigerson, H.G., & Jacobs, S.C. (2001). Traumatic grief as a distinct disorder: A rationale, consensus criteria and a preliminary empirical test. In M.S. Stroebe, R.O. Hansson, E. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds), Handbook of bereavement research (6130647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Assoc.

Traumatic Grief

Criterion B:
4 of 8 symptoms of traumatic stress below:

5. Purposelessness
6. Numb, detached, or absence of emotional responsiveness
7. Difficulty acknowledging death
8. Life is empty and meaningless
9. Part of oneself has died
10. Shattered world view
11. Assume symptoms/harmful behaviors
12. Excessive irritability, bitterness or anger

Criterion C: Duration (symptoms at least 2 months)
Criterion D: Clinically significant impairment

Prigerson, H.G., & Jacobs, S.C. (2001). Traumatic grief as a distinct disorder: A rationale, consensus criteria and a preliminary empirical test. In M.S. Stroebe, R.O. Hansson, E. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds), Handbook of bereavement research (6130647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Assoc.

Survivor's grief response is intense with a prolonged trauma.

Consensus of research indicates grief-crisis intervention helps survivors want to go on living in face of disaster and positively impacts on their ability to cope.

Rubel, B. (1999). Impact of a grief-crisis Intervention immediately after a sudden violent death on the survivor's ability to cope. *Illness, Crisis & Loss, 7,* No. 4, p. 390-401.

Spontaneous Memorialization

FEMA News Photo

Response to death
Connectedness
Identification
Site of death
Extends boundaries
Respond due to shock and sorrow

When Should Grieving Individual Reach Out for Help?

- Substantial guilt
- Extreme hopelessness
- Uncontrolled rage
- Persistent functional impairment
- Substance Abuse

Neimeyer, R.A. (2000). *Lessons of Loss: A Guide to coping*. Keystone Heights, FL: PsychoEducational Resources, Inc.

Homicide Bereavement Counseling -Hatton, 2003

- Advocacy in legal system
- Information about grief and trauma
- Help with concrete needs
- Supporting grief work

Role of the Victim Advocate

- Focus on simple solutions first
- Preparation
- Offer understanding of grief
- Written materials
- Refer

Bereavement Support Groups

- Discuss changes in one's life
- Remember and share memories
- Normalize feelings
- Tell and retell one's story

4 Task Based Model

1: Accept reality of loss
2: Work through pain of grief
3: Adjust to environment in which deceased is missing
4: Emotionally relocate deceased and move on with life

Worden, J.W. (1991) *Grief counseling & grief therapy*, Springer NY: Publishing.

6 "R" Process of Mourning

1. Recognize loss
2. React to separation
3. Recollect & reexperience deceased
4. Relinquish old attachments to deceased & old assumptive world
5. Readjust to move adaptively into new world without forgetting old
6. Reinvest

Rando, T.A. (1993). *Treatment of complicated mourning.* Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Continuing Bonds

Grieving individuals maintain an inner representation of deceased and hold deceased in loving memory for a Lifetime

Klass, D. Silverman, P.S., & Nickman, S.L. (1996). Continuing bonds: New understanding of grief. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Communication

- Clarifying
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing
- Minimal Encouragers
- Probing
- Nonverbal Behavior
- Self Disclosure
- Negators
- Accusers
- Assumer
- Directives
- Clichés

Communication Techniques

- Use person's name
- Allow conversation to evolve
- Allow time for silence
- Be sensitive to person's nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, and feelings
- Self disclosure

Reynolds, B., Galdo, J.H., and Sokler, L. October 2002, Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Victim Assistance Support Strategies

- Learn about case before speaking with family
- Determine need for contact
- Personalize deceased
- Encourage participation in mental health services

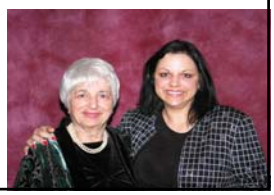
Edmunds, C.N., Peterson, D.L. & Underwood, T.L. (2003). Victims of Criminal Death. In Underwood, T.L. and Edmunds, C. (Eds.), Victim Assistance: Exploring individual practice, organizational policy, and societal responses. NY: Springer.

Self-Disclosure

- Significance
- Technique
- Relationship Enhancement
- Quality & Timing
- Positive Role Model

Everyone faces at all times
two fateful possibilities:
one is to grow older,
the other not."

-Anonymous



Masterpiece Phrases

"A painting in a museum hears more ridiculous opinions than anything else in the world."
-Edmond de Concourt (1822 -1896)

List what people have Said to you in a failed Attempt to bring you comfort after your loved one died.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Describe your reactions To what people have said to you after your loved one died.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Rubel, B. (2006). *Palette of Grief®*, In Press.

You Do Know . . .

Palette of Grief®

Palette of Grief®
Activities and Roles

Check off activities shared with loved one:

- ❑ share household tasks
- ❑ raise our children
- ❑ errands
- ❑ go to the movies
- ❑ travel together
- ❑ attend religious services
- ❑ social activities
- ❑ other_____

Check off roles loved one played in your life:

- ❑ teacher
- ❑ protector
- ❑ lover
- ❑ friend
- ❑ being needed
- ❑ other_____

Discuss how your loved one's lost role has changed your life.

Symbolic Elements
Looking at Photographs

1. Confirm reality & experience
2. Reflect on loss & construct meaning
3. Relive cherished moments
4. Develop new identify; recognize ongoing relationship with deceased

Riches, G., & Dawson, P. (1998). Communities of feeling: The culture of bereaved parents. Mortality, 1, 143-162.

Objects and Symbols

- What symbol in your life signifies your connection to your loved one?
- What significant ritual could you create around this symbol?
- Why would this ritual be meaningful to you?

Palette of Grief®

The Afterlife

- Do you believe there is life after death?
- Do you believe that the afterlife is in a specific place?
- Is the afterlife the same for everyone?

Lester, D., Aldridge, M., Aspenberg, C., Boyle, K., Radsniak, P, Waldron, C. (2001-2002). What is the afterlife like? Undergraduate beliefs about the afterlife. *Omega, 44,* 113-126.

Therapeutic Value of Signs

- Reality
- Auditory and hallucination
- Sense of presence
- Need to know loved one is “okay”
- Psychics and intuitives

Palette of Grief®

Therapeutic Value of Humor

You can't prevent birds of sorrow flying over your head but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair

-Chinese proverb

1. Explain something about your loved one that still makes you laugh.
2. Describe your loved one's sense of humor.
3. Identify what you would say or do if you wanted to make your loved one smile.

Palette of Grief®

Difficult Days Trigger Response

- First year monthly anniversaries
- Yearly anniversary
- Birthdays
- Traditional holidays
- Vacations

What was the most difficult day for your since your loved one's death?

Palette of Grief®

Reactions After Notification of Inmate's Release

- sleeping and eating problems
- headaches, muscle tension
- question faith
- general anxiety

Rituals

Rituals permit meaningful action at a disorganized time; it allows people to 'do something.'
. . . even engaging in a ritual, we feel we have symbolic mastery over events.
Ritual allows reorganization of community and continuity in a chaotic time.
. . . offers reassurance that while we cannot control the tragedy itself, we have reasserted control in its aftermath.

Doka, K.J. (2003). Memorialization, ritual, and public tragedy. In M. Lattanzi-Licht & K.J. Doka. (Eds.), *Living with grief coping with public tragedy* (p. 179-189). NY: Brunner-Routledge.

Successful Rituals

1. Emotionally safe environment
2. Personally meaningful
3. Objects have special meaning
4. Share memories
5. Express emotions freely

Castle, J. & Phillips, W.L. Grief rituals: Aspects that Facilitate adjustment to bereavement, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 8: 41-71, 2003.

From Most to Least Helpful Rituals

1. Remembrance ceremony
2. Create altar
3. Speak to photo
4. Create to honor
5. Write letter or poem

Castle, J. & Phillips, W.L. Grief rituals: Aspects that facilitate adjustment to bereavement, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 8: 41-71, 2003.

Meeting our Objectives

1. Describe factors that influence grief due to a sudden death
2. Identify effective ways to provide support after a sudden death

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