

Confronting Collective and Cumulative Grief:

Self-care as an Institutional Responsibility

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Learning Objectives



After participating in this session, attendees will be able to:

01

Develop a basic understanding of grief, burnout, and secondary trauma as well as features of healthy, collective grieving

02

Recognize self-care as an institutional responsibility that requires confronting manifestations of white supremacy in the workplace

03

Design opportunities for staff to collaboratively create institutional healing practices that can be implemented in their organizations

01

Opening Activity

Grab a stick!

Holding Grief

At the center of your table, you will find an assortment of sticks and crafting materials

Use these materials to decorate a stick to **create a physical token to honor any grief** you may hold

Please feel free to create this during our workshop to reflect while keeping your hands busy

You don't need to be an artist or a crafty person to create something that honors the memory of a loved one—***there is no right or wrong way***

Let's get started on honoring those we have lost





“

“Love invites us to grieve for the dead as ritual of mourning and as celebration. As we speak our hearts in mourning we share our intimate knowledge of the dead, of who they were and how they lived. We honor their presence by naming the legacies they leave us. We need not contain grief when we use it as a means to intensify our love for the dead and dying, for those who remain alive.”

—bell hooks, *All about love: New Visions*

02

On Grief

What is grief?

Grief is the natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a **universal** and a **personal** experience. Individual **experiences of grief vary** and are influenced by the nature of the loss. Some examples of loss include the death of a loved one, the ending of an important relationship, job loss, loss through theft or the loss of independence through disability.

- Grief can accompany any event that disrupts or challenges our sense of normalcy or ourselves
- This includes the loss of connections that define us

Types of Grief

There are various types of grief, and at times, they can overlap or occur simultaneously



Collective grief

Collective grief happens when a community, society, village, or nation all experience extreme change or loss. **Collective grief can manifest in the wake of major events.** Some examples include war, natural disasters, or others that result in mass casualties or widespread tragedy.



Cumulative grief

Cumulative grief, also known as compounded grief, can be described as **a series of losses that occur over a relatively brief period of time.** Research shows that while the losses may relate to various causes, intensities, and areas of your life, they can be harder to cope with than individual losses because of the compounding effect.



Anticipatory grief

Anticipatory grief, also referred to as anticipatory loss or preparatory grief, is the distress a person may feel in the **days, months or even years before an impending loss**, such as the death of a loved one.

The Body's Response to Grief

Loss is an extreme stressor that can take a major physical toll on the body. Grief can overwork the nervous system and weaken the immune system. Some physical symptoms of grief include digestive problems, fatigue, headaches, sore muscles, and chest pain, among others.

Exhaustion

One of the more common early signs of grief is the feeling of extreme tiredness

It's that ***can't-get-out-of-bed tired*** that may keep you from getting up and doing all the things you used to do every day.

It is physically exhausting to grieve, so give your body the time it needs to rest, as your body may feel fragile and tired.

Heart Health and Immunity

Stress hormones can lead to cardiac problems during grieving, leading to increased rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Acute stress can also cause cardiomyopathy, a form of cardiac illness.

One study found that **the incidence of heart attack is increased 21-fold within 24 hours of the death of a loved one**, then declines steadily with each day after that.

How the Body Carries Grief

Grief can affect every aspect of your being — your mind, body and spirit



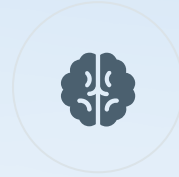
Physical

- Hyper or under active
- Appetite/weight change
- Sleep difficulties
- Vulnerability to illness
- Restlessness
- Crying and sighing
- Lump in the throat
- Shortness of breath



Emotional

- Anxiety
- Loss of Control
- Shock/Numbness
- Sadness
- Irritability
- Anger
- Guilt or regret
- Feelings of emptiness, a physical void



Cognitive

- Disbelief or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased or event
- Dreams of the deceased or sensing their presence
- Searching for the deceased



Social

- Overly sensitive
- Dependent
- Impatient with others
- Lack of initiative
- Withdrawn
- Lack of interest



“

“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but power. They speak more eloquently than ten-thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.”

—Washington Irving

03

Institutional Responsibility

Institutional Responsibility

Homelessness is a traumatic experience, and individuals experiencing homelessness often have histories of trauma prior to homelessness.

While larger systemic work is required to upend the underlying systems of oppression, staff encounter these realities while trying to collaborate with clients to navigate these structures and provide equitable, high-quality, person-centered health care.

In order to adequately provide these services, the health and well-being of staff must be an institutional priority.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by **excessive and prolonged stress**. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

Work-related causes of burnout:

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work
- Lack of recognition or reward for good work
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations
- Doing work that's monotonous or unchallenging
- Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment

Secondary Trauma

Secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma, is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.

White Supremacy in the Workplace

By Tema Okun, dismantlingracism.org

Perfectionism	Power Hoarding
Sense of Urgency	Fear of Open Conflict
Defensiveness	Individualism
Quantity Over Quality	I'm the Only One
Worship of the Written Word	Progress is Bigger, More
Only One Right Way	Objectivity
Paternalism	Right to Comfort
Either/Or Thinking	

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Sense of Urgency

No time for grief



*Quantity over
Quality*

Prioritizing encounters
over wellness



*Worship of the
Written Word*

Bereavement policy and
“nuclear family”



Objectivity

Myth of total emotional
detachment

Healing Spaces

Institutional responsibility to make healing spaces accessible to staff

*Leave policy to attend
funerals and services*



*Notification of loss and
ability to reschedule*

*Collective and individual
processing, during work
hours*



*Value of asking others
what works for them &
value of expertise in the
agency*



Today

Musical offering for Health Care for the Homeless Community



04

Grieving together

Client Passing

The passing of clients can be a particularly challenging time marked with grief

Regardless of the duration of engagement with a client, grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a client, and acknowledging these feelings are essential.

In a whole-person health care model with wrap-around support, it's common for various staff to engage with the same client, leading to a **collective grief that is felt more broadly and communally.**

Language and storytelling are intrinsically human and essential to the mourning process.



Coping with Grief

Give yourself permission to mourn.

- Trying to stay strong and hold it together adds pressure which can cause stress and prevents releasing the pain associated with loss.
- Take time to check in on the grief process that one may be experiencing. This will help ease the pressure of anxiety that grief causes.

Storytelling

Storytelling promotes a culture of community, decreases isolation, elicits support and empathy, promotes emotional catharsis, reduces stress levels, broadens perspective, and strengthens continuing bonds with the deceased.

Storytelling is essentially an exercise of meaning making.

Over the Years

- Homeless Persons' Memorial Day
 - Open to entire community and collectively organized
- Agency-wide communication
 - Sharing provider reflections
- Virtual all-staff memorials
 - Restarted during COVID-19
 - Quarterly
- Artistic expression and participation
 - Poetry readings
 - Staff band
 - Remembrance planter



Sad to Report...

The passing of John Doe*. John was a long-time HCH client and an integral member of our community. He enjoyed strong relationships with many staff and countless clients who were his family. In honor of John, staff have the following reflections to share:

"I'll really miss his energy, his big smile, and his warm greetings. He loved going to yoga class. Sometimes he would stop talking and relax."

"What a gem! He was one of my first patients at HCH. Visits with him were not often easy but were ALWAYS entertaining. It's clear that he identified the agency and our staff as a place he could trust and I'm glad we were able to welcome him."

He would always say- Ms. Jan you take me on a trip and bring me back too soon. As he would say those words, he would laugh and leave my office with that innocent bright smile on his face. John's memories will always be very special to me!"

"I saw John pretty regularly for therapy for last few years. John's favorite thing was meditation and mindful breathing during session. Often I assisted him to think about a safe place during guided meditation. He described safe place as a sunny summer day, laying in a white sand beach with blue sky above him and blue water in front of him where people are having fun."

"John had family who were also HCH clients, and he encouraged them to join him in groups. Many times they came together. There was tenderness, tolerance, and acceptance of each other, which was felt through the whole room. John often said or did something strange or odd in the group, but his good will was known. He apologized easily. We would share a laugh, and then simply carry on."

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day 2018 Baltimore, MD



HOMELESS
PERSONS'
MEMORIAL DAY
2018

END
Homelessness
NOW!

HOLDING
SAVES
LIVES

HOLDING
IS A
HUMAN
RIGHT

everyone
deserves to
go HOME

DELORIS
MILDRED
FOX

ANTONIO
HARRIS

JUAN
ROMERO

BONNIE
BLUEFORD

ROBERT
SREABY

BRYAN

DANIEL
THOMAS
DEPEW

DERRICK
POWELL

EMORY
SARGENT

JAMES
SUMMERS

SEBAS
ESTRADA

JOHN
SCOTT
JR

TYRO
DESHAUN

MICHELLE
SPIVEALL

DAVID
RICE

DONNELL
MYERS

NATASHAZ
FAYE

TODD
RICE

KATY
SIMPSON

PETER
YASTRZEMSKY

HOUSING
IS
HEALTH CARE

Too Many Names

Malcolm Williams



05

Closing and Centering

Thank you!

Thank you for sharing this space with us today and to all of our clients and staff who made this possible.

A very big thank you to Malcolm Williams, Syandene Underwood, Kenny Willis, John Lane, and Eva Hendrix-Shovlin for sharing their artistic expressions with us.

Extending deep appreciation to Ella, Caleb, Sophie, and their families for sharing their time and expertise in stick collecting.





*In loving memory of all those
we hold in our hearts*