Understanding Grief After an Overdose Death

Franklin Cook
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Welcome to the Webinar

Understanding Grief After an Overdose Death

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This Webinar is being recorded.

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Participants will be able to:

• Discuss how three key questions affect bereaved people

• Explain the effects of stigma and stress on the experience of grief

• Give examples of how trauma can play a role in grief

• Consider how the dynamics of addiction and caregiving can shape a person’s grief
Your Webinar Host

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About National Library of Medicine (NLM)

Physical library is Bethesda, MD part of the NIH campus.

Largest biomedical library in the world

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The library is open to everyone

NLM’s mission

Advance the progress of medicine and improve public health by making biomedical information accessible to everyone.
NLM Carries Out its Mission Through the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM)

https://nnlm.gov/

- Nationwide network of health sciences libraries, public libraries & information centers
- Each region has a partnership with a regional medical library
- Outreach provided through
  - Free access to online health & medical resources
  - Free Training & Professional Development
  - Grant funding opportunities available for your community

About 77,000 people received training from NLM last year!
Substance Use Disorder Resources from the National Library of Medicine

Disaster Lit® search of opioid guidelines, reports, factsheets, etc., including:
  Fentanyl Safety Recommendations for First Responders https://disasterlit.nlm.nih.gov/record/16121
  How HIPAA Allows Doctors to Respond to the Opioid Crisis https://disasterlit.nlm.nih.gov/record/16093
MedlinePlus Opioid Abuse and Addiction https://medlineplus.gov/opioidabuseandaddiction.html
  Abuso y adicción de opioids https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/opioidabuseandaddiction.html
Pillbox – Handy tool for identifying a pill that is found https://pillbox.nlm.nih.gov
HealthReach low-literacy patient materials about opioids, opioid addiction, and opioid treatment (includes documents, videos, and audio)
PHPPartners Information Access for the Public Health Workforce https://phppartners.org/

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids https://drugfree.org/
Heroin, Fentanyl & Other Opioids – A Comprehensive Resource for Families with a Teen or Young Adult Struggling with Opioid Use - https://bit.ly/2vb6Onm
Mental Health Resources from NLM

MedlinePlus

[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) – type mental health in the search box.

National Institute of Mental Health


The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is one of 27 components of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Federal government’s principal biomedical and behavioral research agency. Includes information for the public on the signs, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment for anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, eating disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, social phobia (social anxiety disorder). Information is available on Clinical Trials, Statistics and Publications Some publications are available on print for free. Also there is information for research, funding and community outreach.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

Empowers consumers to take action, find social support for their illness and fight stigma.
Offering programming on addiction and recovery?

Consider borrowing one of our Graphic Medicine Book Club Kits featuring *Sobriety: A Graphic Novel*!

From the publisher… “Through rich illustration and narrative, *Sobriety: A Graphic Novel* offers an inside look into recovery from the perspectives of five Twelve Step group members, each with a unique set of addictions, philosophies, struggles, and successes while working the Steps.”

To Request a Kit: [www.nnlm.gov/ner/kits](http://www.nnlm.gov/ner/kits)

For Questions or more Information, Contact Sarah Levin-Lederer at [Sarah.LevinLederer@umassmed.edu](mailto:Sarah.LevinLederer@umassmed.edu)
Our Presenter

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Understanding Grief
After an Overdose Death

New England Region
National Network of Libraries of Medicine
Substance Use Disorder Webinar Series

November 28, 2018

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My Background

• Peer grief helper, trainer, advocate
• Grief support
  • After suicide
  • After a death from substance use (DSU)
  • After a death in the military
• Personal connections
  • Father; Franklin & two brothers; daughter
• Projects: Grief after DSU (Mass.)
  • Frontline service providers
  • Support for the bereaved
Grief ...

• Unfolds naturally
  • People live their way through grief
  • Grief needs space to be what it already is
• Is individualistic
  • Deceased, survivor, their relationship
  • One’s life story is a one-of-a-kind creation
• Serves a purpose
  • Pain of grief is linked to love
  • Grieving is a process of making meaning
• Evolves over the bereaved’s lifetime
  • The deceased is integral to who the bereaved is as a person
Essential Tasks of Grief

• Facing the reality of the loss
• Coping with the pain (and emotions) of grief
• Living in a world without the person
• Exploring continuing bonds with the person
• Engaging in the next phase of life

Adapted from Worden’s “Four Tasks of Mourning” (Worden, 2009, pp. 39–53)
Themes: Grief after DSU

• Key issues:
  • Why?
  • Intention
  • Prevention

• Impact from:
  • Stigma
  • Trauma, distress

• Living with substance use, addiction
Why?

- Practical:
  - What actually happened?
  - Role of substance use, addiction

- Metaphysical:
  - Why my person? Family? Me?
  - View of meaning of life

- Continuing relationship with deceased
Why?: Emotional Responses

• Shock, disbelief, confusion
  ... that substance use took the person’s life

• Helplessness, hopelessness, anger
  ... over power of substances, addiction

• Relief
  ... over end of person’s suffering
Intention

• The person’s decisions and actions:
  • Willful and in their control?
  • Limitations on choice, freedom?

• Two domains:
  • Directly causing the actual death
  • Contributing to the death over time
Intention: Emotional Responses

- Shock, disbelief
  ... over self-inflicted death
- Anger, blame
  ... over person’s perceived role
- Abandonment
  ... over rejection of values, assistance
- Helplessness, guilt
  ... over bereaved’s perceived failure to aid or influence the person
Intention: Accident vs. Suicide

• Delayed official determination
• Disagreements about manner of death

• Emotional responses:
  • Confusion
  • Anger ...
    • Distressful communications with officials
    • Strife among family members
  • Helplessness ... from lacking power, control
Prevention

• How could it have been prevented? Who ...? What ...?
• Can consume bereaved’s energy
• Long, difficult process
  • Always multiple causal factors
  • Treatment system is complicated
  • Epidemic is ongoing
  • Accountability is elusive
Prevention: Emotional Responses

- Anger, blame
  ... at those perceived to be at fault
- Guilt, shame
  ... over survivor’s perceived role
- Shock, disbelief, helplessness
  ... over perceived failure to stop a preventable tragedy
- Fear
  ... over someone else dying
Stigma

- Malevolent (prejudice, discrimination)
- Disenfranchised grief
  - Deceased not as important
  - Bereaved not as deserving
  - Bereaved not “eligible” (illegitimate)
- Isolation, disconnectedness
  - Increases pain of loss
  - Denies comfort and support
  - Positions communities as “judges”
Stigma: Emotional Responses

- **Shame**
  ... over perception of being bad, less than

- **Anger**
  ... over being judged, mistreated

- **Fear, hopelessness**
  ... from being “on my own,” feeling ostracized

- **Stigma and feelings of relief**
Emotional Responses

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Guilt
- Shame
- Blame

- Anger
- Abandonment
- Fear
- Relief
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
Trauma, Distress

- Shock of a sudden or violent death
- Resuscitation attempt
- Finding or identifying the body
- Person’s body not found for days
- Recreating “pictures”
- Media, social media
- Effects of epidemic
# Common Responses to Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor concentration</td>
<td>shock</td>
<td>nausea</td>
<td>suspicion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confusion</td>
<td>numbness</td>
<td>lightheadedness</td>
<td>irritability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disorientation</td>
<td>feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>dizziness</td>
<td>arguments with friends and loved ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indecisiveness</td>
<td>depression</td>
<td>gastro-intestinal problems</td>
<td>withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shortened attention span</td>
<td>feeling lost</td>
<td>rapid heart rate</td>
<td>excessive silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memory loss</td>
<td>fear of harm to self and/or loved ones</td>
<td>tremors</td>
<td>inappropriate humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unwanted memories</td>
<td>feeling nothing</td>
<td>headaches</td>
<td>increased/decreased eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty making decisions</td>
<td>feeling abandoned</td>
<td>grinding of teeth</td>
<td>change in sexual desire or functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncertainty of feelings</td>
<td>fatigue</td>
<td>increased smoking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>volatile emotions</td>
<td>poor sleep</td>
<td>increased substance use or abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpted from the CDC handout "Helping Patients Cope with a Traumatic Event" available at bit.ly/traumafactscdc.
Before the Death Occurs

- Family dynamics of addiction
- Caring for a chronically ill person
- Ambiguous loss
Family Dynamics of SUD

- Maladaptive behavior
- Negative world view
- Other family members’ substance use
- Life disruptions
Intense Situations, Feelings

• Overdoses, suicide attempts
• Repetitive crises
• Verbal or physical confrontations
• Extreme anger
• Feeling trapped, forced, manipulated
• Abandonment, rejection, separation
• Pain over the person’s suffering
• Lack of safety
• Unpredictability
Caring for Chronically Ill Person

• Caregivers experience many losses
  • Practical losses
  • Relational losses

• They face a life-or-death situation
  • Fear, helplessness, hypervigilance
  • Crises, including rescue attempts

• When the worst happens ...
  • Caregiver depleted, exhausted
  • Failure, guilt
  • Loss of sense of purpose
Ambiguous Loss

- Like a death without the person dying
- Physically present, psychologically absent
- Addiction can involve families in the loss
Closing
Questions?

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Next Webinar

Drug Courts: A Bridge Back from SUD
Judge Timothy Bibaud
January 29th 1-2PM

Registration Link:
https://nnlm.gov/class/drug-courts-bridge-recovery/9131
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