

# “HEALING AFTER INFANT LOSS”

PROCESSING, GRIEVING AND MOVING FORWARD”



**MONICA ACOFF, MSW, LICSW**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**TAG COUNSELING AND CONSULTING SERVICES LLC**

**337 AIRPORT ROAD STE B, AUBURN AL 36830**

# *GOALS OF THIS PRESENTATION*



*TO GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS GRIEF*

*RECOGNIZING THE MYTHS VS REALITY OF GRIEVING*

*HOW TO ASSIST CLIENTS/PATIENTS IN THE TASKS MOURNING PROCESS*

*IDENTIFYING HOW HEALING CAN BE APART OF THE LIFE LONG GRIEVING PROCESS*

# GRIEF: WHAT DO WE KNOW



*Grief is one of the most challenging human experiences. Despite how common grief is, our understanding of it remains limited. Stage theories attempt to make sense of grief, but research suggests that they do not capture the full picture. Most of us grieve in ways that do not quite fit any existing model*

# HOW WE ENGAGE WITH GRIEF



*Grief is universal, but also unique: Everyone encounters grief, but no two people grieve in the same way. Even so, there are many myths about how people “should” grieve.*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: There is a “right” way to grieve.*
- *Reality: Some people cry. Some people scream. Some want to be alone, while others seek out social connection. Responses to grief vary widely from culture to culture and person to person. There’s no one correct way to grieve. What’s helpful in one moment may not be helpful in the next moment. Trust what feels right to you*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Grief should resolve after a certain period of time.*
- *Reality: Grief has no time frame. Some feel acute grief for a short time, while others struggle much longer. Grief can also change in intensity around holidays, anniversaries, and stressful life events. While grief often lessens with time, significant losses will likely have an enduring impact*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Grief follows distinct stages.*
- *Reality: Despite the popular belief that grief has five distinct stages, research does not back this up. You might skip stages or go through them in reverse order. Or they may not apply at all. Feel free to refer to stage models if they are helpful, but follow your intuition above all else. No matter how it looks, your grief is real, valid, and meaningful. There is no one map for the grief journey*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Grief is experienced in the same way across all cultures.*
- *Reality: Culture strongly shapes the grief experience. Some cultures see grief as private and personal, while others approach it as a communal phenomenon. Even within the same culture, individuals may grieve very differently based on factors such as age, religion, personality, family situation, and past experiences*



# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Grief is just an intense form of sadness.*
- *Reality: Grief includes sadness, but it can also include many other emotions, such as guilt, anger, and jealousy. Even positive emotions—such as joy, gratitude, and hope--may be part of the grief experience. You may have a rollercoaster of emotions around grief, particularly when a loss is recent. Then again, you may find that your emotions are consistent and predictable. Experiences vary widely.*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Moving on is a betrayal of the deceased.*
- *Reality: After a loss, some feel they can't allow themselves to be happy, enter a new relationship, or move forward in life. Going on with life and seeking happiness does not mean that you have forgotten or stopped loving the person you lost. It's okay to move forward at the speed that feels right to you*

# GRIEF MYTHS VS REALITY



- *Myth: Advice is the best way to help someone who is grieving.*
- *Reality: The temptation to give advice can be hard to resist. While your intentions may be good, advice can come across as impersonal or even judgmental. Your presence is often the best thing you can offer the bereaved. Allow yourself to be affected by their pain, remind them how much you care, and be sensitive to their needs and wishes*

THE GRIEVING PROCESS: ACUTE GRIEF,  
COMPLICATED GRIEF INTO INTEGRATED GRIEF



# THE GRIEVING PROCESS: ACUTE GRIEF

## Acute Grief

- *Immediately after the loss of a infant and for months afterwards, it's normal to have intense symptoms of shock, distress, sadness, poor appetite, sleep trouble and poor concentration. These symptoms will slowly diminish with the passage of time*



# THE GRIEVING PROCESS: COMPLICATED GRIEF

## Complicated Grief

- *Sometimes, the symptoms of acute grief never seem to go away. They can last for years. The loss of a loved one continues to feel unreal and unmanageable. Parents might constantly yearn for the deceased, or experience guilt about the idea of “moving on” and accepting loss*



# THE GRIEVING PROCESS: INTEGRATED GRIEF

## *Integrated Grief*

- *After resolving the most intense symptoms of acute or complicated grief, grieving individuals will enter the lifelong stage of integrated grief. At this point, a parent has come to accept the reality of the loss, and resumed daily life activities. This does not mean that they have missed their infant any less or that they don't feel pain at their memory. They have just learned how to cope. Acute grief may show itself again, especially around holidays, anniversaries and other reminders.*



# TASKS OF MOURNING





# TASKS OF MOURNING DEFINED



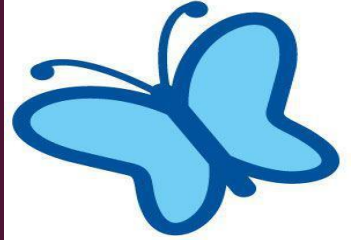
*After an infants death, friends and family face complicated emotions, and a new reality without the hopes and dreams of the future for their infant. They must learn how to keep their child in their heart, while moving forward in life. The tasks of mourning describe how to adjust to loss in a healthy way.*

# TASKS OF MOURNING PROCESS



- *Tasks of mourning may be completed in any order*
- *Tasks of mourning may be revisited multiple times*
- *Tasks of mourning may be completed at any pace.*

# TASK OF MOURNING #1



- *Accept the reality of the loss*
- *Accept the loss both intellectually and emotionally*
- *Recognize the significance of the loss*

## TASK OF MOURNING #2



- *Process the pain of grief*
- *Name and make sense of your emotions*
- *Let yourself feel these emotions, rather than trying to bury them*

# TASK OF MOURNING #3



- *Adjust to a world without their infant*
- *Make practical changes*
- *Adapt to a changing self-identity and worldview*

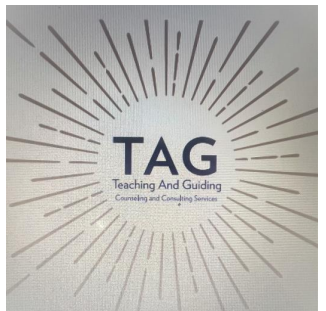
## TASK OF MOURNING #4



- Remember your loved one while moving forward in life
- Create a place for your loved one in your heart that leaves room for the possibility of having another opportunity to parent
- Find a balance between remembering your infant and moving forward

# HEALING WHILE GRIEVING: IS IT POSSIBLE

- *Grieving an infants death can be a lifelong process, yet healing from such a loss is possible. Let's explore how to best promote the healing progression*



# HEALING WHILE GRIEVING: MAKING IT POSSIBLE

*Embracing Not Rejecting Emotions*

*Living Normally Again*

*Healthy Living*

*Finding Balance*

*Counseling*

*Managing unpredictable moments*





# QUESTION & ANSWERS





---

*Finding silver linings (Greater Good in Action). Greater Good In Action. (n.d.). Retrieved September 20, 2022, from [https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/finding\\_silver\\_linings](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/finding_silver_linings)*

*Sergeant, S., & Mongrain, M. (2014). An online optimism intervention reduces depression in pessimistic individuals. Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 82(2), 263.*

*Bruce, C. A. (2007). Helping patients, families, caregivers, and physicians, in the grieving process. The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association, 107(Suppl. 7), E533-E540.*

*Bonanno, G. A., & Kaltman, S. (2001). The varieties of grief experience. Clinical Psychology Review, 21(5), 705-734.*

*Friedman, R., & James, J. W. (2009). The myth of the stages of dying, death and grief. Counseling Today, 51(9), 48-50.*

*Konigsberg, R. D. (2011). The truth about grief: The myth of its five stages and the new science of loss. Simon & Schuster.*

---

Kübler-Ross, E. (1970). *On death and dying*. Macmillan.

Lilienfeld, S. O., Lynn, S. J., Ruscio, J., & Beyerstein, B. L. (2010). Busting big myths in popular psychology. *Scientific American Mind*, 21(1), 42-49.

Lotterman, J. H., Bonanno, G. A., & Galatzer-Levy, I. (2014). The heterogeneity of long-term grief reactions. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 167, 12-19. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1016/j.jad.2014.05.048>

Neimeyer, R. A. (2012). The (half) truth about grief. *Illness Crisis and Loss*, 20(4), 389-396.

Weller, F. (2015). *The wild edge of sorrow: Rituals of renewal and the sacred work of grief*. North Atlantic Books.