



SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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¹ A companion kit entitled *Conversations on Caring – Volume 1* is available through the CHPCA Marketplace (www.chpca.net) for use in Canada in staff development, continuing professional development (CPD) and health sciences education.

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Suggested Process and Learning Objectives for Problem-based, Small Group Learning and Local Staff/Professional Development Learning Circles

INTRODUCTION AND SUGGESTED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

This transcript is a web-based version for use with a companion MP3 professional development podcast. This MP3 session is also part of a larger set of digital audio recordings forming a resource entitled *Conversations on Caring, Volume 1 (CoC)*. CoC is a learning resource which has been prepared from previous Pallium Project professional development events. These events are the *Monthly Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Audio-conference Program* series. The *Monthly CPD Audio-conference Program* series was supported in 2005 and 2006 through a contribution from Health Canada's, Primary Health Care Transition Fund (PHCTF) as part of Primary Health Care Renewal in Canada. The views expressed in these sessions do not necessarily reflect the official policies of Health Canada or the employing organizations of members of the Pallium Project's, Community of Practice. These materials have been prepared as "reminder resources" for participants of the original CPD sessions and as learning resources to help support improved access and enhanced quality for provision of Hospice Palliative Care in Canada.

The MP3 audio files and this PDF of the written transcript have been post-produced from the original event in order to provide essential information and enable use, generally within 1 hour time blocks. Each of the sessions has been based on topics which practicing Registered Nurses have identified as important to improving practice and service locally as part of a 2005-2006 audio-conference series entitled *Improving Care in Our Communities*. While program-developed and organized principally from a nursing process and case-management perspective, sessions reflect the inter-professional and trans-disciplinary perspectives of both the Guest Resources/Invited Panelists and the local participants, many whom reflect a diversity of perspectives of social workers, spiritual care providers, primary-care physicians, hospice/palliative program volunteers and others.

SUGGESTED LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

By the end of the session the participant should be able to discuss all or part of the following:

- The phenomena of "grief" as a normal aspect of the human condition and "being human."
- The concept of "integrating loss" as essential work of the bereaved.
- Key concepts associated with grief as an active, ongoing process.
- Common reasons why holidays and other meaningful dates can serve to intensify grief/grieving processes.
- Select issues/concerns that might present as prospective risk factors for unhealthy grieving.
- Common strategies/practices which may be helpful in assisting families with grief, especially during holidays.

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Guest Resource

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Guest Moderator

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Edmonton, Canada

Original Air Date – December 15, 2005

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I think we wanted to start, Beth, talking about grief and bereavement just to give people a sense of the normal expected kind of process that people who are grieving a death could be going through at this time of year. I think what is important for people to remember is that it is a normal expected life experience that is related to adjusting to loss in one's life. It is important not to pathologize that experience.

Grief is a process of accommodation or adjustment to what has occurred – an integration of a death or loss into one's life. I think also as bereaved people work through their grief, what they are also doing is finding ways to create a new relationship with the person who has died – a way to move forward in their life without that person, but yet to take the connections and the past relationships that they had forward.

Another thing that strikes me, or that I would like to say about grief is, much like we always say in hospice palliative care that pain is what the patient says it is and that is also true of grief – that grief is what the person says it is. It includes feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, depression – I am sure you are all able to relate to these kinds of things when you actually think of your own losses and your own grief. I think also, when I think about grief, I think about it as a search for meaning or purpose in life. Having a sense of what did this relationship mean to my life – in fact, what did the death mean, what is the purpose of this whole experience and how am I going to find meaning in my life without this person and without my life with them?

BETH LIPSETT

Do you think that looking for meaning is an essential part of integrating the loss?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely – yes. I think as human beings, how we connect to life is the meaning we make of it and if your life is going along in a certain direction and all of a sudden that direction changes, there is that process of trying to sort out, well, why did that happen and what am I going to do with it now – how am I going to make a future for myself, how am I going to find a way to cope with what is happening, what do I want the rest of my life to be about?

Maybe another thing just to mention in terms of grief, and I am quite expecting that people are largely familiar with these kinds of ideas, is that grief is a process. It is a process that involves moving through various transitions. In our material here at Victoria Hospice, we talk about the image of the “labyrinth” as a way to think about the grief process.

As I think about the first phase of grief, if you will, that occurs when a death has happened we talk about that as being walking the edges. This is a beginning that brings recognition that the death has occurred. The death and the grief that results from that event are the primary experiences with time. So, it is often the time when we see people quite numb and in shock, going through the motions – that kind of thing – and really what the process involves at that point is people trying to cognitively understand that this death has occurred.

The second phase, if you will, if you think of the labyrinth, we talk about entering the depths– so moving into the centre of that labyrinth and I hope people are familiar with labyrinths because they are not like a maze where the point of the maze is to try to get lost or to lose you, but in fact, a labyrinth is a very predictable, guided walk to the centre and then you return back out via the same path. If you think about moving towards the centre of the labyrinth, entering the depths of your grief. At this point, the reality of the death moves from being an intellectual recognition that it has occurred to being a deep emotional or cognitive based experience. So, it moves from the head to the heart if you will.

BETH LIPSETT

Do you find that people go through that process at different rates – they may stay walking the edges longer or entering the depth?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I think so Beth and that could vary depending on the person's grieving style. It could vary upon cultural implications, the personality of the person, but certainly everyone will have their own rhythm and their own way of moving through this.

BETH LIPSETT

Terrific. That's good to know.

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WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I think in this process of entering the depths and becoming immersed in the experience of pain, if you will, that people really move from reviewing the death itself to reviewing the relationship – really living their life without the person who has died – so going through life as a new experience in fact. Often people feel very uncertain about the future, feel very overwhelmed by the experience at this time and wondering if things will ever feel different than this.

From there, if you will, the third phase - moving back to the outside of the labyrinth from the centre - we think of that as reconnecting with the world and this is a time when people begin to move away from focusing on the death and focusing more on life. They are now integrating this experience more into their life as it is – they are mending their hearts, if you will, looking towards the future, having a sense of creating a new normal and a new life for themselves.

BETH LIPSETT

I would imagine that when we come to a place where significant events are happening (anniversaries) and for us and our topic today (the holiday season) that people must feel a different kind of shift when they think that they have done that work and moved forward and then Christmas shows up and can you talk a little bit about what that might be like for people during this time of the year – what grief might be like for them.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Sure, I mean, what comes to mind just as you are talking, Beth, I think sometimes people might in fact be surprised that the grief is still even there – that this is a time that traditionally may have been a joyful or time if celebration and in fact, it looks very different for them. As you said, I think all holidays, special dates and anniversaries – particularly, I think that the first time people go through them are pretty much all challenging. Why is it that the holiday season is perhaps particularly challenging for people I guess?

One of the things that I notice is that people often begin to have this anticipated sense of dread almost as early as November. I don't know about other communities across the country, but I certainly notice that in Victoria on November 1st, they take the Halloween decorations down and they put the Christmas decorations up. Right from that time, it's beginning for people.

I think another factor is that, it is the time of year as well – winter is approaching, certainly in our part of the country, it is gray and rainy and in other parts of the country it is probably snowy and people are quite isolated, more indoors time and less light – so I think that just that piece of it can complicate people's grief. I think the thing about this particular season is that it is not an individual event. It is a community event – whether it be Christmas or Hanukah or

whatever celebration people have that it is publicly declared and it is everywhere that you go, it is relentless, in fact. People often, I think, feel bombarded – they watch the calendar, they see the decorations in the stores, it is on the television, it is in the newspaper, when you are driving down the street the Christmas lights are up. It is impossible I think to escape the reminders.

BETH LIPSETT

Yes and I think people are often, this time of year regardless of how you celebrate, traditionally we celebrate with the people we feel closest to. I would imagine it feels very much like there is a hole – like a piece of the puzzle is missing.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely – that is a very good point Beth. I think it is a place of stark contrast for people of past pleasant memories, of that person being there and that is being placed in contrast or juxtaposition that the current reality is that this person has died and no longer in their life. It is almost a collision of past and present. I think sometimes what we can be inclined to do is kind of lift up past events – so past Christmases or Hanukahs are being seen as being perfect and so how on earth am I going to compete with that this year?

BETH LIPSETT

Right – even if they weren't perfect.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely. I would like to just touch on that too because we talk so much about the celebration and the joy and those kinds of things around Christmas but for a lot of people, at the best of times it is not that kind of a season so I think for people who had unhappy remembrances or events in the past, what they are left with is the sense that they can never make it any different or they can never make it any better. What they are left with is the reality of what they had in the past. Does that make sense?

BETH LIPSETT

Absolutely. Absolutely.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

You also mentioned, Beth, about how often people feel they are going back in their grief because things are so heightened for them at this time of year. I think that is a really important point.

The grief process, of course, is not a linear kind of process – it is one step forward, two steps back; it is going in circles; it is waves – whatever the images are that we use to think about it. I think this time of year can really heighten people's anxiety about ability to cope, fear of what is ahead. I think it can heighten their sense of guilt about having a time of celebration or a time with family where the person who died no longer can be and sadness that they won't be there to share in the anticipation and the activities.

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BETH LIPSETT

Yes. Just when you think you might have accomplished that sense of integration and moving forward and wondering if you have to start back at the beginning again.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely.

BETH LIPSETT

So, what is helpful as we try to assist families through this process?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

What's helpful? Can I just say one more thing before we move on and I am just thinking about the expectations that people have around this holiday time of year and I think those expectations occur on a number of levels. I think as individuals we have expectations about how we should be or what it is that we want. I think our families, the bereaved families, have expectations about that and I think also those community expectations around celebration and joy and music and all those kinds of things. I think that is another piece where people can really struggle is in regards to expectations.

BETH LIPSETT

That's right. I would agree with you.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I am glad to hear that!

BETH LIPSETT

Most of us listening to you speak are working daily with families and it can be very challenging to know how to assist people as they find themselves at this season when there are all of these expectations and they are still feeling this sense of sorrow over the death of their loved one. Where do we go? How do we be helpful?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Good question. As I think about what is helpful for bereaved people, I think that there are maybe two things I would say off the top - one is preparation and the other is flexibility. I think for myself, as I am anticipating something in the future - like this teleconference - preparation is part of what gets you through it. You anticipate what is coming up and you try to think about how you are going to manage and you go into it feeling more confident. I think that is also true for the bereaved as they anticipate the holiday season. I think the flexibility piece is about it won't be exactly as you expect.

If you have the ability to kind of let go of some things as you are going along or adapt to what it is that comes up then that can have a better feeling as well. I think for us as care providers there are a whole lot of ideas about ways we could support people, but I think there are some general principles that we use whenever we are supporting people who are bereaved or grieving. I think that is like

acknowledging the experience that the person is having – so, in this case, acknowledging that this likely will be a difficult time for the person and to be willing to hear their story and be present to what it is they need to tell us or want to tell us and to not judge what it is we are hearing.

Some of the don'ts, I suppose are to not make assumptions about people's experience based on our own experience because, of course, as we said earlier, everyone grieves differently depending on their age, culture, grieving style – whatever it might be – and not to give advice.

It is so tempting for us when we see someone struggling or in pain that we want to offer some helpful advice and my experience of advice is that when I give it, people don't take it anyway (especially my daughter, but there you go). You know what happens – advice is based on my experience and what works for me and it doesn't acknowledge the other person's experience and what would work for them, so what is helpful is for us to help them find what would work for them. Those are probably some general kinds of comments I guess about being helpful.

As I think about preparations for the holidays, there were kind of three key places or areas, if you will, that I thought would be helpful to people. I will just say what the three are at first and then go back and talk a little bit about them. One area is around their grief and caring for themselves through the time ahead. The second area is around relationships and the third area is around the holiday event themselves. I will talk a little bit about each and then if people have questions we can come back to that later.

With regards to people's grief and caring for themselves through the time ahead, you know the kinds of things I think are very helpful are, as I said, acknowledging how their grief and loss is heightened at this time. That is really normal. We might want to ask people if they are not telling us that. We might want to open the possibility by saying something like, "I know often for people it is really difficult because they look ahead to the holiday season, is that something you are experiencing right now?" So, it just gives people permission to talk about it and it normalizes it to people.

Another thing that is helpful is to realize that they are going to have highs and lows – that there is going to be positive and negative aspects to the experience and for them to think about how they are going to support themselves and deal with those things as they encounter them. I think around their grief as well it is really helpful for people to think about if they want to talk about or honor or think about ways to include the person who died in the holiday season. Of course, there are lots of ideas about that – limited by only people's imaginations, but that might be things like lighting a candle or doing a memory activity or having a prayer or toast. In fact, I have a very short letter here from one of our bereaved clients who had just come

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through the holiday season and – “Thanks for remembering the anniversary of Aggie’s death. All of the family were at my son’s house this holiday weekend for what we thought was going to be a sad occasion. Frankly, I was dreading it and didn’t even want to go. Surprisingly, however, the weekend was anything but sad. Certainly there were some tears, but for the most part, it was a celebration with a lot of reminiscing and a lot of laughter. The grandchildren decorated a table and we visited places we had gone as a family when we all lived in Victoria. I had prepared a biography of mine and Aggie’s life together from the first time we met until Aggie’s death last year. I presented the small document to my four children as a gift. We looked at old slides and shared stories and memories. It was a very rich experience and a wonderful weekend together.” So, just for this man, in anticipating what might be ahead and the family thinking about things they could do together, it became something more than he even could have imagined.

BETH LIPSETT

And the fact that he was open to that happening.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely. I think also, it is very important for us to give the bereaved people permission to take care of themselves through the holidays – to really consider their own needs and not put those on the backburner – all the things we know about that help us keep healthy in terms of exercise and rest and support and being gentle and patient and kind to oneself. Those are really good reminders.

People sometimes forget what it is that they can do to take care of themselves. I think that the final little piece in this grief section is encourage them to trust their own instincts, their own reactions and intuitions about what is right for them right now. I think often, and you will know this Beth, that people don’t trust what they intuitively feel. They are bereaved and it is a good reminder for them that they in fact do have what they need to get through this time.

BETH LIPSETT

I think sometimes the concern of family and friends that this is going to be a rough time just accentuates that doubt sometimes.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely. This is a nice segway into area that is key and that is about relationships. I think one of the most important things for people to think about is communicate, communicate, communicate – that it’s really important for families and friends to sit down ahead of time and really talk about what they are concerned about – talk about what it is they need and how they are grieving and try and do some planning together about how they can move through this time. One of the things we see in families whether it is at this time of year or any time of year is that everybody in the family grieves a little bit differently or a lot differently and that can make it hard to support one another I think.

Just reminding people that everyone has their own style of grief and their own pace of grief and it won’t look the same. It is a good reminder for people that under this stressful time, likely those differences may become more apparent. And to be ok with asking for help you know. I wonder how many people on this teleconference have trouble asking for help. I suspect that most of the hands will go up. It is a good reminder that other people are often wondering how they can support the bereaved person and may not want to ask or may be uncertain about what to do so encourage people to ask for a little bit of help at this time.

That, then brings me to the third key area that I thought about and that is with regards to the holiday activities and events themselves. I kind of think of this as customizing the holiday. So we talked about creating a flexible plan – something that can change – but really do think about what are the traditions that people really want to keep or are really important and also think about what are the things that they could let go of? For some people it may be very important to hold onto a number of traditional activities or ways of doing things and other people may just want to run away and have nothing of the familiar. Giving people a chance to sort through where they sit on that continuum is really helpful.

BETH LIPSETT

And it may be different the first year than it is the second I would imagine?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Absolutely and I think the other thing about being the first year if people decided to change things this first year, they can always go back to doing things that are familiar the next year. It is never written in stone. I am thinking about a couple of women who came to one of our “Preparing for Holidays” sessions and they had both been recently widowed and did not have family in town and I guess both really wondered what on earth were they both going to do for this first holiday season on their own. I guess they made a connection and got together afterwards for coffee and they ended up both packing up and going to Hawaii together.

BETH LIPSETT

That’s wonderful.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Yes, so I mean that was very creative. I also think to encourage people or give people permission to tear down their expectations. I am thinking about a lot of those practical things – sending cards, doing baking, decorating, shopping. There are different ways to do things or not do things at all.

I think of a woman who received a whole number of cards prior to Christmas and, of course, people were also either acknowledging her husband had died or didn’t know so it

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was very difficult for her and she hated these joyful expressions of the holiday season, if you will, and did not want to send Christmas cards and didn't quite know what to do with it and she was quite in fact an instrumental griever and didn't know what to do with it. We often talk around grief about people who are intuitive grievers who express their grief emotionally and connect with other people on that level.

On the other end of that continuum are the instrumental grievers who are more cognitively based who express their grief more through activity and conquering problems in dealing with issues. This woman kind of tended toward that instrumental end I guess and so what she did – sorry, I am making this a very long story – is that she took all those Christmas cards that she found so difficult and almost irritating and she took a paper making course, then took them all and made them into new paper, made cards and sent the cards out to those people.

BETH LIPSETT

Isn't that remarkable?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

It is and so she completed the circle if you will and she found a way to make it work for herself.

BETH LIPSETT

That's great.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

So I think we can encourage people about thinking about doing things differently if that's what they want to do.

BETH LIPSETT

Absolutely. Because so many of us doing this kind of work, we get connected to the patients and the families that we work with. As you mentioned all of us have loss in our own lives as well that can be triggered just as easily by the season. I am wondering if you could talk a little bit about how our own grief can impact our ability to care for the people who we are working with.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I guess, Beth, really that is true at any time we are working with people who are grieving. Often the potential is there that our own grief is triggered and, certainly as people who work in this field, it is something that we encounter quite often and so, how is it that we keep our own pain and suffering as separate from the pain and suffering of the people who we are working with. I think we need to work with awareness as one piece. We need to know what our own triggers are. We need to pay attention to our own grief and our own sorrow and our own pain. We need to make sure that we have ways to process that and to deal with that, whether it be through our own self care or through journaling or counseling or whatever it is.

One piece is being proactive I think as well. Not only do we need to be aware of our own grief, we also need to have ways to deal with it. I live in a small urban center you might say, so in some ways there are some natural boundaries that occur. It is not often that I would work with someone that I know but that is not true for many of our communities across the country where people know the people who have died, they know the people who are grieving and how much harder it is then to separate out or make sure our own grief doesn't override someone else's. Of course, working with awareness again is absolutely critical with that and I think for us to know at what point does our empathy become something different. It is that awareness about whose grief is it here?

BETH LIPSETT

I think that is a challenge for people because you can't help but be connected. As you said in small communities, you are attending the same church, you are shopping in the same grocery stores and I would imagine that those barriers are very difficult to maintain.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Likely then, all the more important to have strategies for that in terms of do you have colleagues you debrief with? Do you write about your grief? Do you have your own counsellor? What is it that you need to do in order to attend to your own because when I think about psychosocial care which is what we are really talking about, to me, the main tool that we bring to that kind of care is ourselves. If we think of ourselves as a tool, then we need to care for it. We need to make sure that it is sharp and well-oiled and that it gets its yearly tune-up.

In order to care for others, then of course, as we all know, we must care for ourselves. I think that is particularly true at this time of year and there may be times when we need to say, you know what, this is just too close to home. There is just too much similarity here for me. My life circumstance matches theirs or I know them too well or whatever it is that we need to maybe say, I am not the best person to be the supporter right now.

BETH LIPSETT

Right. Well, I want to thank. Some of what you have said has just made such good sense to me. I would like to see if there are questions from the audience?

NANCY CASTLEBERRY, NOVA SCOTIA

Hi, this is actually Nancy Castleberry attending the same conference with Sheila D'Eon. Thank you very much – an excellent presentation. Just looking at the handout that we have to accompany your presentation - I had a couple of comments about the advice that was given in terms of supporting children through the holidays. For the most part, I agreed with what was there, but I had some concerns about asking children what they find most comforting and meaningful and also letting children know that whatever

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they are feeling is ok. The reason being is that I don't know if children if you ask them how they want to be comforted or how can this be meaningful, that that really is a very sophisticated question that you might run past an adult, but a youth or a child griever, I am not sure that that is how that needs to be worded to ask the child what they find comforting. I think that if you are the caring adult, then you know what your child likes to know what your child finds comforting. That is the one comment there. The second...

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Great point Nancy and you know certainly anything you say to children has to be in the context of developmental age and relationship and understanding, so of course, you are absolutely right that you wouldn't necessarily ask a question in such a way. Perhaps, a better way to think about it would be, it is important to attend to what it is that children find comforting and find a way to acknowledge and include that in the planning at the time.

NANCY CASTLEBERRY, NOVA SCOTIA

Thank you. Thank you very much. I like that. The second thing is your point about the developmental age of the child because also on that same handout where it says let the children know that whatever they are feeling is ok. So often in grief work I hear people talking about children expressing their feelings. That may be true for adolescents, but younger children are not very good at articulating what they are feeling. They are more able to act out what they are feeling. Behavioral markers will tell us what they are feeling but they are not going to say, "I am sad" necessarily. You get the occasional younger child but usually they are crying or they are petting their dog or they are quiet or they are acting up. I just wanted to comment that very frequently younger children do not know what they are quote feeling or they can't say what they are feeling.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I think that is a good point and in some ways they are a lot like those instrumental grievers who are much less likely to talk about or express their emotions. They are much more likely to act them out or work them out through other ways. You are quite right. We often see kids working things out through their behaviours or play rather than their words. I think that is true of kids developmentally in lots of ways, isn't it?

NANCY CASTLEBERRY, NOVA SCOTIA

Yes, it is. Thank you.

BEGINNING OF A NEW DAY WAA K SIS TUAKII, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Hi, I have quite a few that have Christmas grieving in twos or all together at the same time. Do you approach it any different?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Well, I guess the challenge of that is there is a whole lot of stuff going on at one time and so people's grief at that time is very likely to be complex for them as well as us for trying to help them. It may be very difficult for them to even tease out what it is that they are struggling with at this point. I would approach it as someone who is dealing with multiple losses and someone who is at high risk likely for difficulty in their grief. Start slowly and it is very hard to answer that very quickly but I think all I could do without spending half an hour talking about interventions would be to acknowledge that that is going to be complex.

BEGINNING OF A NEW DAY WAA K SIS TUAKII, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Would you address suicide directly as well?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

I would, yes. I think one of the things people can often struggle with in their grief is social stuff. One of the social things that often happens in our culture if you will is that people are not very comfortable talking about death. When death has a stigma attached to it like suicide then I think people struggle even more to talk about it and I think as supporters, one of the most important things we do is that we name things – that things are not shameful, they are not to be hidden.

Obviously, you take your cue from the person that you are working with but this is something that we can talk about and this is something we can hopefully work through together. I think it is a time often I don't know your experience or your training so don't be offended if I say this, but I think that this often may be a time as well where a referral to a professional might be a good idea.

BAXTER HUSTON, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Could you identify a single most problematic or frequent – it may be the same thing or not – impediment to the natural process of grieving and the grief process. Would it be culture, secularism, materialistic needs?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

That sounds like a bit of a loaded question there. You know, just of the top, so this is kind of a gut response, the thing that might be most challenging for grief for people is a perceived lack of support. People who feel isolated, misunderstood. What do you think Beth?

BETH LIPSETT

I would agree. I think that probably one of the most difficult things for people is that they feel very alone in their grief and they really need someone as you had said previously who listens, who is non-judgmental and is just present with them and allows them to be wherever they happen to be – that has been my experience.

SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

BAXTER HUSTON, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Are there particularly problematic cultures, by cultures I mean more than just Catholics? I mean secularism, the culture of poverty or possibly racial or national cultures. Is there any particular problematic one that you have found?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Well, I think there are so many things that can complicate our experience of grief and we can talk about our culture and the challenges we have in terms of ritualizing our grief and acknowledging and that kind of thing. I suspect each culture has its challenges. I think often where people may struggle and it kind of connects to that idea of sense of isolation is if they have dissonance with their culture. If their experience or expression doesn't fit in with the predominant kind of culture expectations, so that is a really big can of worms!

BAXTER HUSTON, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Okay, so even if like myself, you come from trailer trash culture as long as you feel kind of good, you are okay right?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Yeah, why not?

BAXTER HUSTON, TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Thank you.

BETH LIPSETT

So, Wendy, I wanted to thank you very much. Do you have anything you would like to close with?

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Of course I do. One thing I would just like to mention – or maybe were you going to talk about the website Beth? If the handouts people got plus all our other bereavement handouts are available for downloading off our Victoria Hospice website, so if that is something that would be helpful, it is www.victoriahospice.org. There may be a handout that says dot com but it is not dot com. It is dot org.

There is also a list of bereavement books and resources. There are a few good little “grief and the holidays” kinds of books available and I believe those are referenced on the website. I think in terms of things to remember, supporting bereaved people through the holidays or at any time is that we need to remember that it is about our relationship with them. We need to be genuine. We need to be ourselves, to listen, be patient and to not make assumptions about their experience.

I think it is important that we have knowledge, that we familiarize ourselves with the grief process for example or familiarize ourselves with some of the issues that people might be facing with and it is also important to remember that there is no right way to grieve.

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Finally, I think we need to take care of ourselves and to remember that this isn't something for us to fix – that we cannot take people's pain away – that it is their pain and their experience. We need to remember that our own grief may be triggered as well. Do I have time for just a final reading?

BETH LIPSETT

Sure.

WENDY WAINWRIGHT

Okay. A lot of you will be familiar with this but it just came to my mind this morning as I was thinking about speaking with you all. It is Kahlil Gibran from “The Prophet” with apologies to him for abridging this. “Your joy is your sorrow unmasked and the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find that it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful, look again into your heart and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Some of you say that it is joy that is greater than sorrow and others say, nay, that sorrow is the greater but I say unto you that they are inseparable. Together they come and when one sits alone with you at your board remember that the other is asleep upon your bed. Verily, you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy” and I just think that that is so true of people's experiences at this time of year.

BETH LIPSETT

That is really a nice way to close. It is a good fit. Thank you. Wendy, just in summary, in terms of what you have talked about today, some of the messages that we can take away with us are that:

- the grief process is normal and it is to be expected;
- that grief is whatever the person says it is and that grief is not something to be resolved, but rather integrated into one's life.

I think if we can remember those things we will probably all be able to best support the people we are working with.