

Helping Staff Grieve  
with Cumulative  
Death

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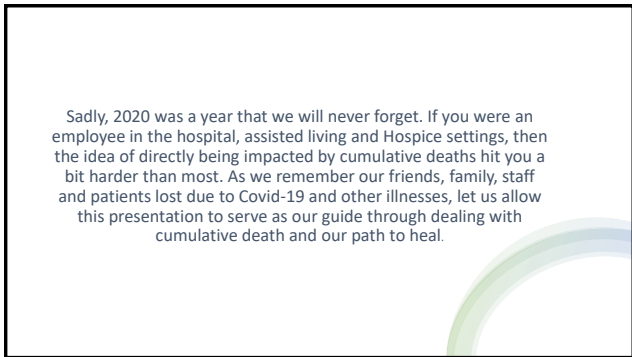
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Sadly, 2020 was a year that we will never forget. If you were an employee in the hospital, assisted living and Hospice settings, then the idea of directly being impacted by cumulative deaths hit you a bit harder than most. As we remember our friends, family, staff and patients lost due to Covid-19 and other illnesses, let us allow this presentation to serve as our guide through dealing with cumulative death and our path to heal.

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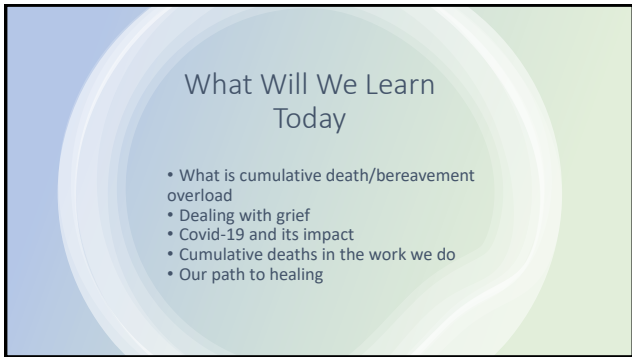
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What Will We Learn  
Today

- What is cumulative death/bereavement overload
- Dealing with grief
- Covid-19 and its impact
- Cumulative deaths in the work we do
- Our path to healing

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*Grieving multiple losses is far more common than we might imagine and can lead to grief overload. How many times do we say that troubles all come together? So...*

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**What is cumulative death?**

Cumulative death- Occurs when two or more people die at, or very near the same time. As a result, many of us have experienced "bereavement overload".

Bereavement Overload which is a term first introduced by Psychologist Robert Kastenbaum is when an individual is grieving more than one loss at the same time, or where losses occur shortly after each other, such that one loss is not dealt with before the other occurs.

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If you work in assisted living then you've heard the old tale of patient dying in "3s".

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**Your turn....**

What comes to mind when you think Cumulative deaths? Think about how have you been Impacted. What has that looked like in your own life. What about staff you've worked with?

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From the moment we are born there is only one certainty in our lives. That is that we are going to die. Whether we live of 3 weeks, 3 years, 30 years or 90 years, life is a precious thing, each day is a gift

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**DEALING WITH GREIF:**  
**Pop Quiz**

**What are the 5 stages of grief?**

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- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Not everyone will experience all of them and you may experience many other emotions during your grief journey. Most people are in shock to begin with. You may also experience guilt, or jealousy. The grieving process is certainly not predictable and everyone will have their own personal grief journey, depending on lots of factors. Having support of family and friends or from a good therapist can really help. Trying to keep a positive attitude and keep busy will also help.

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### How Long Is the Grieving Process?

Some say that a normal grieving process takes around 2 years. But everyone is different.

Grieving is a gradual process, where you learn how to live and cope with your loss/losses. It doesn't have to be a depressing time. It can be full of memories and love, laughter and tears. Strong emotions are not always negative but are part of the healing process.

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**Grief is not a one size fits all approach. You journey through the grieving process is yours. As long as you're not harming yourself or the people around you, your process is absolutely normal.**

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### Grief has no boundaries.

It happens to rich or poor. Royalty and celebrities - no one is exempt. In this we are all equals. Trying to make sense of it all is easier if you accept that it is a fact of life. The one certainty in life is that our lifetime will end.

Birth and death are such natural parts of life, but it's very hard to accept when it's your soul mate, your partner, a close friend or patient who dies, especially a young person. It also brings home your own mortality.

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### Make the most of your life

It's so easy to forget just to make the most of every day and that your impact is still important to your colleagues and patients. Be kind to your family and friends and enjoy the life you have. The loved one who has died will always be a major chapter in your life. Never forgotten. Your day-to-day life continues on though. Your lifespan, no matter how long or short goes on. It, too, is precious. You owe it to the rest of your family and friends to grieve, yes, but move on.

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### Stuck in Grief

Some people get depressed and need help to move along the bereavement path. If you find yourself getting stuck in grief, don't be afraid to ring for help. Chat with a friend when you feel despair or join a grief support group

Remember there is a difference between grief and depression. Don't be afraid to grieve, to feel pain, to cry and let it all out. But if it gets overwhelming, then think about getting some help from your doctor. Some people may find it impossible to get over their grief by themselves and may need more help. Sometimes this is called 'Complicated Grief' or 'Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

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Cumulative Deaths in the work we do and Covid-19

LET'S TALK...

What was the impact covid-19 had on your company/job?

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Researchers Say

- The US has experienced more deaths from (COVID-19) than any other country and has one of the highest cumulative per capita death rates. In an article published by Hailey Bondy (New York Times), Dec. 4 2020, at least 106,000 residents and staffers of nursing homes and other long term care facilities have died from the illness.
- Nursing homes account for as much as 40% of the U.S. deaths during the pandemic. Now, with nursing home residents and employees among the first in line for a COVID-19 vaccine, help is on the way. But the latest surge in cases is leaving some workers in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other eldercare organizations — many short-staffed and low on funds — weary and demoralized.
- Long-term care facility workers, who are underpaid, tend to work in multiple facilities to make ends meet. They inadvertently carry the virus to different institutions and throughout their communities. The older residents are often more vulnerable to the disease, and they live communally—often with roommates.

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Our Path To Healing:

As stated in the beginning, the work that we all do is important to the millions of clients that we serve. It also means that we are on the frontlines helping put the pieces together after tragedies and death. I would like to think that because of the skills we possess, we are in a great place to help ourselves and each other through the cumulative deaths that may have impacted our work and our lives.

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**What can we do at work to support each other through the grieving process?**

1. Start a grief support group. This could be a time set at your place of business, if they allow or at an off-campus site. When we grieve, we are never alone - so many of us suffer loss each day. Find others in the same boat
2. Resist Comparing Your Grief to Other People's. This impulse to compare and contrast our grief with others is natural. We're social creatures and we crave the knowledge that what we're experiencing isn't completely foreign or outside the norm.
3. Spend Time Grieving Intentionally. This one sounds strange, but it's based on a key idea in the mechanics of emotion: What we resist, persists.
4. Seek out the right kind of social support. The idea that you should seek out social support during grief is one of the most common pieces of advice out there for processing grief. It's also one of the most misunderstood.
5. Understanding that there is more to grief than sadness. A common pattern I see among people who struggle with grief is that they believe it's somehow wrong or unnatural to feel anything other than sorrow and sadness. But these rigid demands and expectations for their emotional lives often end up magnifying their suffering.
6. Take your self-care seriously. An underappreciated part of healthy grieving is taking care of yourself, especially your body. Diet and nutrition, exercise and physical activity, and sleep are very healthy ways to ensure that your grieving process is productive.

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Have Questions?  
The virtual floor is yours...

*"The greatest gift is not  
being afraid to question"*  
-Ruby Dee

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**Helpful Resources**

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
- **COVID Grief Network:** <https://www.covidgriefnetwork.org>
- <https://whatsyourgrief.com/>

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