Good Grief!
Can’t You Just Get Over It?

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Participants will:

◆ Gain an understanding of the essentials of grief as a continuum from diagnosis through after death.

◆ Explore the three dimensions of grief.

◆ Identify best practices for supporting those who are grieving.
What is Grief?
love is...

...a memory that still brings a lump to your throat.
Grief is……..

– The body’s natural reaction to change and loss
– Cumulative
– Different for everyone
  – Different reactions and coping skills
  – Different time frames
  – Differences within a family
– Painful and lonely
Grief is….. (cont’d)

– NOT just when a loved one dies
– NOT on a timeframe or schedule
– NOT linear
– NOT the “5 Stages of Grief!”
Grief throughout disease

The Process of a Patient’s Illness

- Symptoms develop; changes may occur
- Tests, doctor appointments, specialists
- Diagnosis given
  - *May be expected outcome OR may come as a surprise*
- Adjustment to diagnosis and prognosis
- Continued progression of disease
  - *Continued losses*
- Nearing end of life
- Death of patient
Dimensions of Grief
~ Dr. Alan Wolfelt, PhD

1) **EVASION** from the New Reality

2) **ENCOUNTER** with the New Reality

3) **RECONCILIATION** with the New Reality
Dimensions of Grief: Evasion from the New Reality

Mourning Characteristics
~ Shock
~ Denial
~ Numbness
~ Disbelief

Primary Needs of Mourner
~ Self Protection
~ Psychological Shock Absorber

Time Course
~ Weeks
~ Potentially Months
(Variable)

Primary Role of Helper
~ Supportive Presence
~ Assist with Practical Matters
Dimensions of Grief: Encounter from the New Reality

**Mourning Characteristics**
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Physiological Changes
- Explosive Emotions
- Loss, Emptiness
- Guilt
- Sadness, Remorse

**Primary Needs of Mourner**
- To experience & express reality of the death
- To tolerate emotional suffering

**Time Course**
- Many months
  - (Variable)

**Primary Role of Helper**
- Encourage expression of thoughts & feelings
- Stabilizing, comforting presence
Dimensions of Grief: Reconciliation from the New Reality

Mourning Characteristics
~ Organize & plan toward future
~ New, healthy relationships
~ Openness to more change in one’s life

Primary Needs of Mourners
~ Convert relationship with deceased to one of memory
~ Develop new self-identity
~ Relate loss to context of meaning

Time Course
~ 24-36 months
(Variable)

Primary Role of Helper
~ Supportive encouragement
~ Understanding, available presence
How do we help those who are grieving?

Best Practices
Bob turns a tragic loss into a lame attempt at helping others cope.
Best Practices for working with the grieving

❖ “Companioning”

Companioning the Bereaved
A Soulful Guide for Counselors & Caregivers

ALAN D. WOLFELT, PH.D.
Best Practices for working with the grieving (cont’d)

❖ Active Listening & Being Present
Best Practices for working with the grieving (cont’d)

- EDUCATION about grief—"Normalizing"
  - Be cautious with this—don’t dismiss feelings or misinterpret a serious situation
Best Practices for working with the grieving

- Not being judgmental
  - Just because someone grieves differently than you do or think they should, does not mean they are grieving inappropriately
Best Practices for working with the grieving (cont’d)

❖ Stories
• Ask about their loved one and let them share
Best Practices for working with the grieving (cont’d)

- Roller Coaster of Grief
  - Within oneself
  - Family Dynamic
Best Practices for working with the grieving (cont’d)

❖ “Ocean” analogy
  – Floating vs. resisting
Best Practices
for working with the grieving
(cont’d)

– Embracing new reality
– Helping client acknowledge the person s/he was before, but is now forever changed through the grief process
  – Trying to get back to the way things were----but accepting that loved one is dead and client is a very different person now.
– Help them grieve cumulative losses
– Recognizing all that has changed has changed
– Education of these concepts and issues
– Baby steps toward building or identifying new skills
Good Grief!
Can’t You Just Get Over It?

NO, YOU CAN’T…..
BECAUSE IT IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION.

BUT YOU CAN:
– LEARN FROM GRIEF
– GROW FROM GRIEF
– LIVE WITH GRIEF IN A POSITIVE WAY