



# Navigating Loss, Loneliness, and Aging: RECONNECTING TO SOURCES OF STRENGTH

## PART 2 – GRIEF AND THE NEW NORMAL

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### THREE SERIES



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**VCU Department of Gerontology**  
<http://www.sahp.vcu.edu/departments/gerontology/>



**Virginia Department for Social Services**  
[www.dss.virginia.gov/](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/)

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### A PROGRAM FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVERS WORKING IN ADULT DAY CARE SETTINGS

A FOUR-PART WEBINAR SERIES




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At the end of this series, YOU will have an increased understanding of:

the difference between <b>grief</b> and <b>loss</b>	the areas of life that loss can impact	how to work towards a " <b>new normal</b> "	activities and resources for <b>navigating loss</b>
<b>person-centered</b> care as it relates to loss	the importance of <b>self-care</b> for the professional	the relationship between <b>loss, loneliness, and social isolation</b>	<b>risk factors</b> for loneliness and social isolation
the <b>health consequences</b> of loneliness and social isolation	how loneliness and social isolation impact the body's <b>immune system</b>	the health benefits of <b>social connectedness</b>	activities for enhancing social connectedness

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At the end of this webinar, you will have an increased understanding of:

- Grief and the 5 stages of grief
- How grief can present in older adults
- How to work toward a new normal

## SESSION 2 Learning Objectives

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# GRIEF



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- The actual emotion and reaction caused by loss
- Keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow, painful regret

*Grieving is a highly individualized process with differences that need to be respected.*

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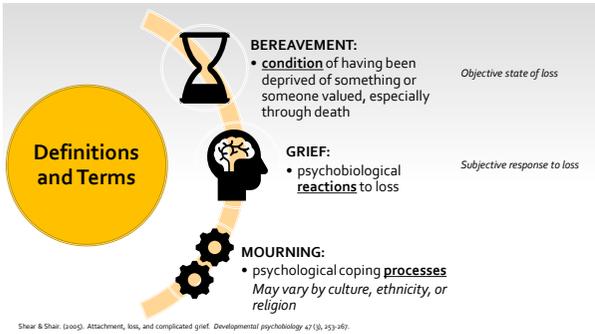
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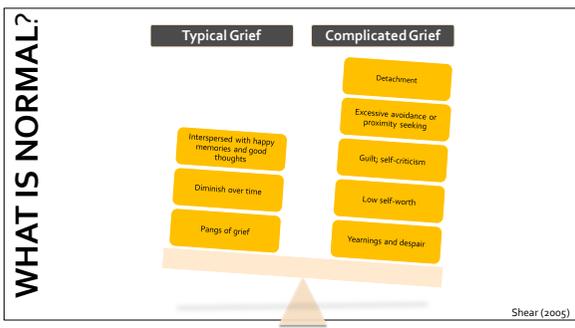
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### Grief & Loss

**Grieving is highly individual. Everyone grieves differently.**

There is no "normal" timetable for grieving. Grieving takes time.

Understand that participants may be grieving even if they haven't lost a loved one or the loss is not recent.

Behaviors and signs need to be examined to determine if they are a function of grief and loss.

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**HOW WE WANT GRIEF TO WORK**

**HOW GRIEF ACTUALLY WORKS**



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### A HOLISTIC LOOK AT GRIEF



- BIOLOGICAL**
  - Shortness of breath
  - Stomach aches
  - Appetite changes
  - Weaknesses
  - Intestinal problems
  - Sleep changes
- PSYCHOLOGICAL**
  - Fear
  - Loneliness
  - Helplessness
- SPIRITUAL**
  - Struggle to find meaning
- SOCIAL**
  - Isolation
  - Apathy

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**BEST PRACTICE:**

**Practical Application for Adult Day**

- Integrate grief and loss into Plan of Care for participant
- Include participants and family in care plan meeting
- Recognize symptoms of grief and loss
- Provide action plan
- Assign / identify staff to carry out plan
- Follow up

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- DENIAL**  
Conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, reality relating to the situation involved.
- ANGER**  
Used as a coping mechanism to deal with the shock of the loss
- BARGAINING**  
Some people stay in this state although most usually move through it.
- DEPRESSION**  
In some studies, adult children caregivers were found to be more in denial than spousal caregivers.  
*(Review case study #2 presented again on next slide and discuss)*
- ACCEPTANCE**

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### Scenario: Dave

Dave, an 85-year-old brilliant, retired physician has spent his career setting up clinics for indigent care and teaching medical students as well as having his own private practice. He now has a heart condition and appears very anxious at times.

He is also beginning to show some slight signs of confusion.

His wife of 60 years has recently died and since living alone he has been calling 911 several times per week at all hours of the day and night complaining of stomach pain.

So far, though, the hospital has not found any conclusive reason for the pain and has not admitted him. His daughter, Nan, the only family member living in the state, lives about 15 minutes away.

He calls Nan several times a day complaining of pain or asking how to operate things (such as the microwave) in his apartment. Each time, Nan answers the phone but becomes short with him, as she is juggling her full time job and 2 young children.

She has been meeting her Dad at the ER each time he calls 911 - any time of day or night. She was beginning to look into long-term care placement when she discovered adult day care.

Now, Dave attends 5 days per week from 7 am until 5:30 pm. When Nan arrives to pick up her Dad she is often very short with the staff and complains about being the only one in the family dealing with him.

She keeps talking about nursing home placement. When staff mentions Dave's confusion, she replies, "Oh, that's just normal aging- he's fine."

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- DENIAL
- ANGER
- BARGAINING
- DEPRESSION
- ACCEPTANCE

In this stage the person may become angry and hostile to those around them

This anger could be directed at God, themselves or others close to them.

Can be a very difficult time for those that care for the individual

Try not to take this anger personally.

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- DENIAL
- ANGER
- BARGAINING
- DEPRESSION
- ACCEPTANCE

The person may bargain silently with his/her God or higher power to try to regain control of the situation, often making promises.

"If you only will \_\_\_\_, I promise I will \_\_\_\_."

Rarely provides a workable solution.

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Natural state of sadness, regret, fear, etc.

Shows the individual has begun to accept reality

Can be misinterpreted as cognitive impairment/dementia in older adults.

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## GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

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In this stage, the individual accepts the new circumstances that came from loss.

Indication that there is emotional detachment and objectivity.

A calm may come over the person as he or she lives out each day.

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## How to support someone who is grieving

### LISTEN

Let them tell the story over and over. Repetition is part of the healing process.

### CARE

Don't try to have the answers or the perfect thing to say. Tell them you can't imagine what they are experiencing but you care.

### BETOLERANT

Understand that the process may be slow and let them go at their own pace.

### VALIDATE

Give them the freedom to be sad and grieve. Letting go is hard!

### CELEBRATE

As you listen, show you value what they lost.

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Support Groups  
Offer

Offer topical  
discussion groups

Other ideas?



### BEST PRACTICE:

How to Support Grief and Loss in Adult Day

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## SCENARIO: Eunice

Eunice is a 68 year old female who has been attending the Sunrise Adult Day Center for 10 years. She has a developmental disability and has required assistance her entire life.

She lives with her son, the primary caregiver. Eunice loves attending the center and each morning greets everyone as they arrive. She enjoys helping staff set up activities and is very social. She likes to get hugs from everyone and staff and participants enjoy her sweet disposition. In fact, it feels as though she is the "face" of the center.

One day, Eunice does not show up to the center and it is soon discovered she has died in a car accident. Her son, the driver, was injured but is expected to be okay. Everyone at the center is shocked.

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**1. What Was Normal Prior to The Loss?**

- Relationships
- Employment inside or outside of the home
- Recreation
- Spirituality
- Support
- Caregiving

LOSS

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### 1. What Was Normal Prior to The Loss?

Write about that in a journal or on a tablet.




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Best Practice:  
**REMINISCE**

Provide opportunity for  
reminiscing

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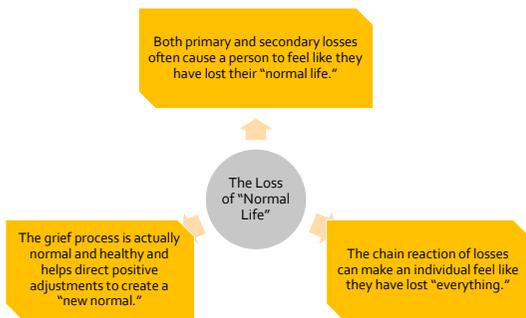
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The  
**NEWNORMAL**

The desired outcome of the grieving process is to find a way to move forward by:

- Integrating the loss into one's life
- Creating a new way of thinking and of living within the confines of the loss

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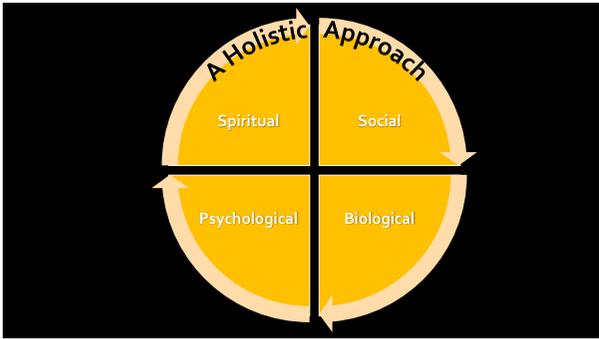
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**Biological**



Finding a new normal means addressing biological needs and taking good care of the basics.

- Adequate sleep
- Hydration
- Exercise
- Nutrition

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**Best Practice:**

**Practical Examples for Adult Day Care**

- Exercise groups
- Walks with small group
- Balloon volleyball
- Parachute
- Dance
- Opportunity to rest in separate room with recliners
- Other ideas?

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**Psychological**

**Finding a NEW NORMAL means addressing psychological needs.**

- Ageism and age-related losses can devalue an older adult's perception of their worth.
- Illness and frailty further impacts feelings a lack of value and self-worth.
- Our participants desire to maintain personal dignity in the context of their lives not as a "disease process" or their limitations.
- We need to focus on the quality of life, identify areas where we can validate their worth.

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**Psychological**

- It is important to older adults to have autonomy and to be involved in decision-making regarding their own lives.
- This is particularly true in the face of losses that have required dependence on others.
- Participation may be actual (such as participating in care plan) or "symbolic."
- Facilitates positive coping and may offset feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

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**Best Practice:**

Practical Examples in Adult Day

Decision making	Empowerment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning activities together</li> <li>• Concurrent programming</li> <li>• Offer choices throughout the day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking advice</li> <li>• Other ideas?</li> </ul>

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**Social**



**Finding a NEW NORMAL means addressing social needs.**

Human beings are designed for meaningful relationship, which can be significantly altered through loss.

Abandonment is a fear of aging individuals.

Developing new social connections is important at whatever level is feasible.

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**Best Practice:**

Practical Examples in Adult Day

- Coffee klatch
- Encourage participants to help with center chores
- Encourage music and dance activities
- Encourage small group activity
- Small group tables for lunch
- Other ideas?

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## Spirituality/Religion



**Finding a new normal means addressing spiritual needs.**

- It can be a significant source of coping and strength.
- Source of transforming hopelessness into hope and meaning.
- Individual's spiritual struggle and reexamination of belief systems can look like unbelief.
- Transcendence - the boundaries of the ordinary physical human existence. (*Trans - over, Scendere - climb*)

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- Bible study groups
- Meditation or yoga groups
- Nature groups
- Discussion group topics

**Best Practice:**

**Practical Examples in Adult Day**

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**HELPFUL MESSAGES**

- Validate**
  - "I know she meant so much to you"; I can see you are really upset
- Reminisce**
  - "Tell me more about your Mom"; "Do you have any photos of her?"
- Reassure**
  - There is no time-line for grieving, we all grieve at our own pace
- Show you care**
  - She sounds like an amazing person

**UNHELPFUL MESSAGES**

- Minimizing the loss that has been experienced**
  - "Oh, it's okay that you can't drive anymore. Someone will take you."
  - "Your husband is in a better place."
- Communicating that the grief response is too strong or not appropriate**
  - "Please don't keep crying. It's upsetting the others."
- Suggestions that it's time to "move on"**
  - "Your mother wouldn't want you to continue to be sad."




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**WHAT CAN YOUR CENTER DO TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH?**

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**CASE STUDY #2**  
*Dave and Nan revisited:*

**ACTION PLAN**

Using the information about Dave and Nan and what you have learned this course, answer the questions on the handout to create an action plan for supporting Dave and Nan through loss, grief, and finding a new normal.

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**Family and Peer Community Support**

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Mental Health America
- Faith-based Groups
- Private Mental Health Practices
- Hospitals
- Community Mental Health Agencies
- Online communities/organizations

**Educational Classes**

**Support Groups**

**Coping Skills**

**Links to Resources**

**Advocacy**

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### 5 Stages of grief: Review



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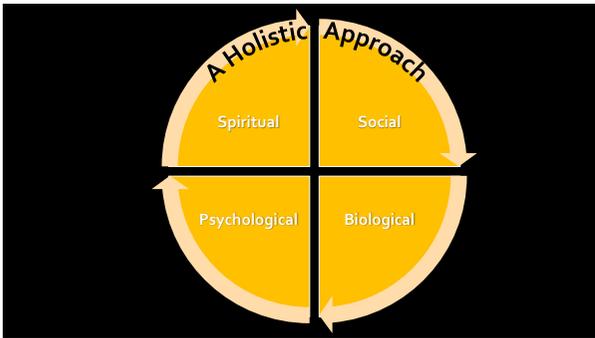
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



VCU  
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF HEALTH SERVICES  
HEALTH PROFESSIONS

- Phone: (804) 828-1565
- Website: <http://www.sahp.vcu.edu/gerontology/>
- Email: [agingstudies@vcu.edu](mailto:agingstudies@vcu.edu)
  
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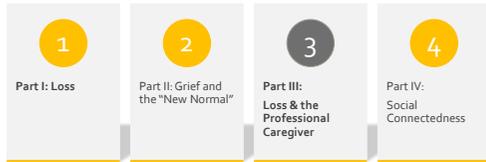
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## Review parts 3 and 4



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THANK YOU

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