Grief, Loss, and Self-Preservation

Taiann Knetge, LCSW | **December 5, 2023**

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

- We respectfully acknowledge that we live and work in territories where indigenous nations and tribal groups are traditional stewards of the land. Our California office resides in Tongva territory.

- Please join us in supporting efforts to affirm tribal sovereignty across what is now known as California and in displaying respect, honor, and gratitude for all indigenous people.

Whose land are you on?

Option 1: Text your ZIP code to 1-907-312-5085

Option 2: Access Native Land website via QR Code
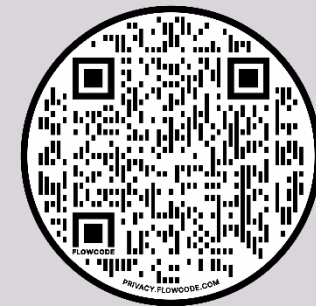
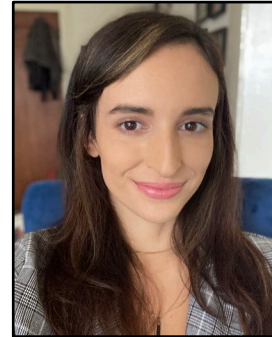# Advocates for Human Potential, Inc. (AHP) MIP, Round 1 and Round 2 Team

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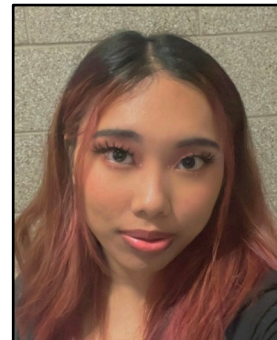
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MIP HUB and Past Events

Looking for past event recordings? Want to register for future events?

MIP HUB
Username: mipgrantee
Password: 2miP@hp

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Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

Recognize	Recognize the various ways that grief and loss can present in individuals.
Explore	Explore your role in promoting strategies and techniques tailored to help someone manage grief and loss and increase positive ways of coping.
Identify	Identify at least one evidence-based strategy for working with individuals experiencing grief or loss.
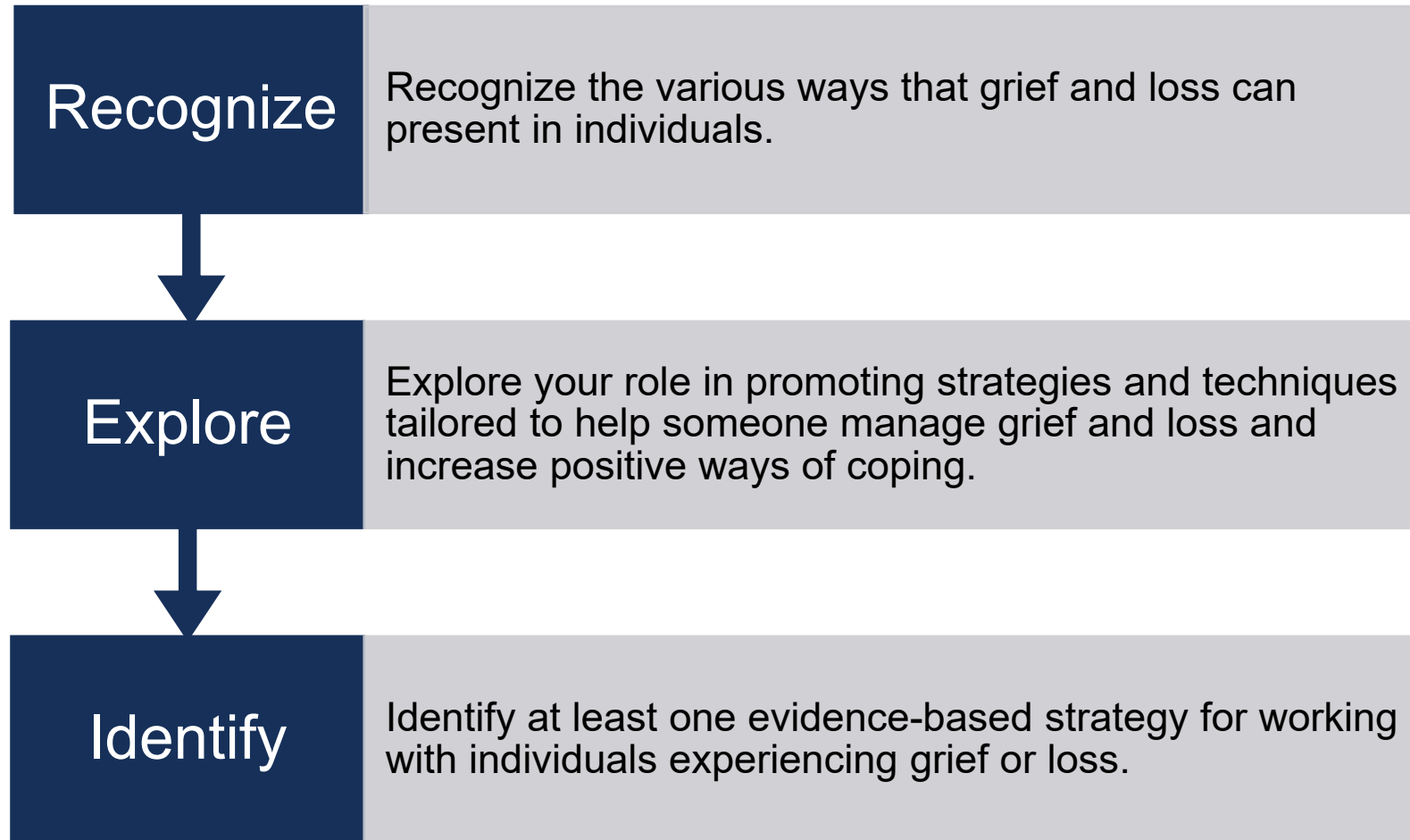
What Do We Mean?
Defining grief and loss

Grief	Loss	Bereavement
• Emotional and mental distress • The feelings associated with loss	• Failure to keep or maintain	• The state of having lost someone or something, <u>specifically to death</u>

Types of Loss

Developmental Losses

External/Event-Based Losses

Traumatic Losses

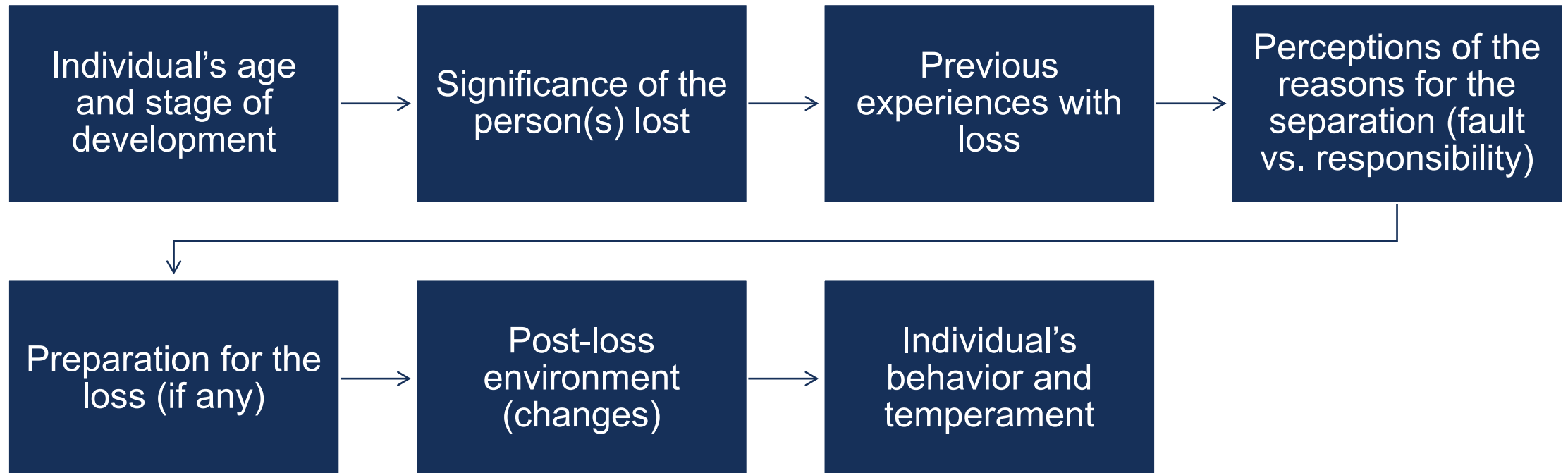# Key Differences Between Loss from Death (Bereavement) and Other Loss

- Other losses are not necessarily permanent.

- Other losses are not universal.

- With other losses, even if improbable, there is <u>a possibility of HOPE</u> for the return of the lost object/person.

Concepts of Death

- **Universality:** The understanding that ALL living things must die, that death is all inclusive, inevitable, and unpredictable.

- **Irreversibility:** The understanding that once the physical body dies, it cannot be made again.

- **Nonfunctionality:** The understanding that once a living thing dies, ALL typical, life-defining functions of the living body (walking, breathing, eating) stop permanently.

- **Causality:** The concept of attributing a specific cause or reason for the death.

- **Noncorporeal Continuation:** The belief that some form of personal continuation exists after the death of the physical body.

- **Children can develop a basic understanding of death around age 7, but they do not gain a more comprehensive understanding until at least early adolescence or until they develop the skill of abstract reasoning/thought.**

Speece, W. M., & Brent, M. (1984).

Factors That Influence Reactions to Loss

Individual's age and stage of development	→ Significance of the person(s) lost	→ Previous experiences with loss	→ Perceptions of the reasons for the separation (fault vs. responsibility)

Preparation for the loss (if any)	→ Post-loss environment (changes)	→ Individual's behavior and temperament

PDQ Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board. (2022*).*

Normal Grief?

- Grief is a very NORMAL reaction to an abnormal situation (the loss of a loved one).

- Everyone's experience of grief is individual and unique:
    - It may be influenced by the nature of their relationship with the person who died.
    - How the loved one died.
    - How they learned about the death.
    - Influenced by their last interaction with the person who died.
    - Influenced by culture, religious beliefs, or intersecting identities.

PDQ Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board. (2022).

Common Reactions to Grief

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive
• Nausea • Palpitations • GI upset • Headaches • Stomach aches • Insomnia/hypersomnia • Clumsiness	• Guilt (real or imagined) • Anger • Despair and loneliness • Desire to be with the person who died, even in death (not the same as active suicidal ideation—assessment is very important) • Numb feeling	• Difficulty concentrating/focusing • Slowed thinking • Forgetfulness • Hearing the deceased (not necessarily a pathological auditory hallucination—assessment AND cultural consideration is vital) • Difficulty making decisions

What Is Traumatic Grief?

- "Traumatic stress reactions to a death that interfere with the ability to accomplish the tasks of bereavement."

- May occur when the loss was related to a sudden loss/death, violent loss/death, a death that was violent/sudden and witnessed by the bereaved individual.

- Again, all losses/deaths represent a crisis, but not all are traumas or traumatic.

- Grieving, and all the associated reactions, are NORMAL responses to loss.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.).

How Children's Grief Reactions Differ from Those of Adults

- Children's grief reactions may last longer than those of adults.

- Children under age 11 have more limited cognitive abilities to understand the nature of the death and its implications.

- "Children have different ways of coping with loss than those seen in adults. "Children are more likely to distract themselves, cling to familiar activities and routines for comfort, deny the loss for periods of time, and use fantasy to cope with the suddenness and pain of the loss."

- Children's grief reactions when a parent dies will be affected by the developmental need to identify with that parent. Children need to hold on to attributes or characteristics of the person who died more than adults who can separate themselves from the characteristics of the deceased.

- Identity is more deeply affected by loss in childhood because self-development is still in process.

Speece, W. M., & Brent, M. (1984).

Children and Grief

- Kids can only tolerate intense grief in spurts (10–15 minutes).
  - This can look like the child doesn't understand or is in "denial" as they act as if nothing has happened.

- Give kids "bite-size" pieces of information.

- Address their fears and anxiety, but DO NOT make unrealistic promises (e.g.,"Mommy will never die.").

- More than ever, kids need as much normalcy as possible.
  - Regular rules, routines, structure, limit-setting. (It's tempting to not enforce rules during this time, but this is not helpful!)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.).

Children and Funerals

- Children should not automatically be excluded from funerals or other mourning rituals. Instead, consider the following:
  - The child's developmental age/functioning.
  - The elements that the funeral/ritual will include.
  - The availability of safe, known adults to support the child, especially if a living parent or caregiver is overwhelmed by grief.

- If the family decides to exclude a child from participating in the funeral or ritual, creating a modified, age-appropriate way for the child to say goodbye to their loved one is very beneficial.

- Funerals or other mourning rituals serve an important function in the grieving process and help connect us to culture and identity. For these reasons, they are as important for kids and for adults.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.).

Mourning Rituals

- Nearly all cultures have specific practices around mourning the death of a loved one.

- Many of these rituals relate to how the body of the deceased should be handled, what happens after the death (for the deceased), and also for the survivors.

- Mourning rituals play an important role in healing, and many who are bereaved find comfort in these practices.

- What happens if you are not able or free to engage in these rituals? What if distance or availability is a factor? What if one is isolated from their family or community?
  - What if one's intersecting identities prevent them from openly expressing grief or participating in mourning rituals?

Brown, E. (1999).

View of Death and Dying in Latino/a Culture

- The immediate and extended families play a major role in the area of death and dying within the Latino/a culture.

- Large family networks provide comfort and practical aid while grieving.
  - This is reflected in the culture's before and after death rituals. An example of these rituals is spending days rotating prayer vigils by the bedside of the deceased family member.

- Expression of grief is a common and accepted practice.

- Rituals and practices facilitate the grief process as death and dying are prevalent parts in Latino/a culture.

- Crying and wailing are often expressed and seen as a sign of respect and love.

- It is frowned upon for men to show demonstrative acts of grief, such as crying or wailing. Instead, men are expected to grieve in a more reserved manner.

Hernandez, E., Rosales, A., & Brodwin, M. (n.d.).

J. William Worden's Tasks of Mourning

1. To accept the reality of the death.

2. To process the pain of grief.

3. To adjust to a world without the deceased.

4. To find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of beginning a new life without their physical presence.

Worden, J.W. (2018).

Thoughts on Historical Trauma

"Pain travels through family lines until someone is ready to heal it themselves. By going through the agony of healing, you no longer pass the poison chalice onto the generations that follow. It is incredibly important and sacred work."

— Stephi Wagner

Historical Trauma

"A legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations."
(Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 2013)

"The primary feature of historical trauma is that the trauma is transferred to subsequent generations through biological, psychological, environmental, and social means, resulting in a cross-generational cycle of trauma."
(Brown-Rice, K. 2013)

"The trauma of the elders of a community affect the descendants through the stories that are told, the warnings that are given, the survivor's approach to parenting including racial socialization, and the behaviors that are modeled."
(Bryant-Davis, et al., 2017)

What Is Historical Trauma?

- **Historical trauma** can be conceptualized as an event or set of events perpetrated on a group of people (including their environment) who share specific group identity (e.g., nationality, Tribal affiliation, ethnicity, religious affiliation) with genocidal or ethnocidal intent (i.e., annihilation or disruption to traditional life ways, culture and identity). (Walters, K. L., et al., 2011)

- **Historical unresolved grief** is the grief that accompanies the trauma. (Brave Heart, M. Y. H., n.d.)

- **Disenfranchised grief** is experienced when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged and publicly mourned and results in the intensification of normative grief reactions such as anger, guild, sadness, and helplessness. (Doka, K. J.,1991)

- **Historical trauma response is a constellation of features in response to this trauma that may include "depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger," substance misuse, and "difficulty identifying or expressing emotions."** (Brave Heart, M. Y. H., 2003)

Self-Preservation

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

— Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*

Remen, (1996)

Prevention/Intervention Strategies

Physical	Psychological	Emotional	Workplace
• Sleep well • Eat well • Dance • Exercise/movement	• Self-reflect • Read for pleasure • Say "No!" • Smile • Seek solitude	• See friends • Cry • Laugh • Praise yourself • Humor	• Take breaks • Set limits • Get peer support • Get supervision and/or consultation • Use vacation time

Resilience

"Resilience refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development." (Masten, A. S., 2001)

"Resilience is the result not only of biologically given traits, but also of people's embeddedness in complex and dynamic social contexts; contexts that are themselves more or less vulnerable to harm, more or less amenable to change, and apt focal points for intervention." (Harvey, M. R., 2008)

Resilience

- Resilience is a protective factor!

- Resilience is about being emotionally healthy and able to successfully confront challenges and bounce back from setbacks.

- Resilience is a capacity we are born with.

- Resilience is something we can nurture in ourselves, our children, our communities.

Community & Family Services Division at the Spokane (WA) Regional Health District. (n.d.).

Building Compassion and Community

- Create a microculture for support.
  - Microcultures should offer encouragement and support as well as hold you accountable.

- Practice compassion for yourself and others.
  - Reflect on times when you were shown compassion or on situations where your capacity for compassion was activated or increased.

- What can you do for large-scale systematic change?
  - Find ways to become involved in efforts aimed at large-scale changes.

Finding Balance

- Engaging with our life outside work
  - Make your work environment humane and a healthier place to be.

- Moving energy through
  - Use breathing techniques and physical exercise

- Gratitude
  - Practice gratitude daily
  - See challenges as teaching moments

Finding Balance

- Let's take a moment to breathe

What Is Familiar to You?

- What mourning rituals are most familiar to you?

- What has been your experience talking about death, grief, and loss?

- How did you feel discussing these topics today?

What Do You Know About Yourself?

- What do you do at the end of the workday to put difficult stories from clients away before you go home?

- What are your vulnerabilities?

- How do you protect yourself while doing this work?

Thank you!

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Q & A

Upcoming Events

December Events		
Continue the Conversation	1 p.m.–2 p.m.	12/07/2023
Mentor Office Hours	12 p.m.–1 p.m.	12/14/2023
Intern Office Hours	2 p.m.–3 p.m.	12/14/2023
Webinar: Opioid Basics	ASYNCHRONOUS	01/09/2024

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