Is it Depression or is it Grief?

Symptoms and Significance in Bereavement

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The Well of Grief

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Today’s Goals

• Compare and contrast symptoms of depression and grief in bereavement
• Recognize the role of a quest for meaning in mourning, and growth in grief
• Identify some practical principles for addressing both forms of distress in bereavement
Depression vs. Grief

**Depression**
- Self-focused, alienated from others
- Hopelessness
- Low self-esteem, self-loathing
- Guilt about feeling worthless or useless to others
- Pervasive inability to experience pleasure with people or activities
- Chronic feelings of not wanting to live; acute suicide risk

**Grief**
- Maintained connections to others
- Hope for improvement
- Overall feeling of self-worth
- Guilt and regret about “letting down” the deceased
- Loss of pleasure related to longing for loved one
- Suicidal feelings related to yearning for reunion
- Consoled by friends, music, etc.
The Toll of Tragic Loss: Grief, Trauma and Depression in Bereavement

McDevitt-Murphy, Neimeyer et al., Psychological Trauma
Incidence of PTSD, CG, and Depression

- PTSD: 19%
- Depression: 49%
- Complicated Grief: 56%
- 37% None
Co-morbidity of PTSD, CG, and Depression

PTSD total: 19%
CG Total: 56%
CG & Depression: 23%
CG only: 14%
Dep. only: 7%
Depression Total: 49%
None: 37%
Adaptive Grieving

**Acute Grief Processes**

- Process “event story” of the death, attempting to make sense of it and its meaning for our lives now
- Access “back story” of relationship to restore attachment security and resolve unfinished business with the deceased

**Integrated Grief**

- Finality of death acknowledged
- Bittersweet emotions accessible & changing
- Mental representation of deceased revised
- Coherent narrative of loss formulated
- Life goals redefined
Sense-making predicts better grief adaptation in:

- Palliative care
- Natural death losses
- Violent death losses
- Bereaved:
  - Parents
  - Spouses
  - Young adults
617 ethnically diverse adults in first two years of loss
Controlled for cause of death, nature of relationship and other background factors
Principles of Practice

- Stabilize depression when present
- Draw on people’s prior resources for coping
- Practice self-soothing skills
- Seek supportive interactions with others: DLRs
- Structure days with manageable goals
- Name and claim grid-related emotions, and address the needs implicit in them
- Honor the deceased, and restore the bond
- Treat the trauma, when present
- Find a way to tell the story, and make it whole
- Integrate the loss into life in a way that promotes growth and the capacity to love
- Medicate depression when necessary, not grief

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