

# The Many Dimensions of Loss: Grief as a Core Concept

Kenneth J. Doka, PhD

Professor, The College of New  
Rochelle

Senior Consultant, The Hospice  
Foundation of America

# Goals of Presentation

- Understand the many ways persons experience loss
- Evaluate the utility of varied concepts to understand the nature of loss
- Understand the utility of grief counseling as a generic approach to counseling

*Anything that you have, you can lose; anything you are attached to, you can be separated from; anything you love can be taken away from you. Yet, if you really have nothing to lose, you have nothing.*

Richard Kalish, 1985

# Understanding the Many Dimensions of Loss



# A Typology of Loss

- Developmental or Maturational Loss
  - Transitional
  - Functional
- Physical or Tangible Loss
  - Death
    - Validated
    - Disenfranchised
    - Secondary
  - Non-Death
    - Relationship
    - Property
    - Functionality
- Psychosocial Loss
  - Illness-related
    - Anticipatory
  - Other
- Symbolic Loss
  - Loss of Safety or Security
    - Personal
    - Societal
  - Loss of Identity
  - Existential Loss

# Developmental or Maturational Loss

- As we age we inevitably experience losses
- Transitions as a source of loss
- Losses as we give up treasured activities or hobbies



# Retirement and Empty Nest *Are they Losses?*



BRETT RYDER

- Any transition inevitably has elements of loss
- Only a small minority (about 10 % retired; around 20 % empty nest) have severe reactions

# Developmental or Maturational Loss

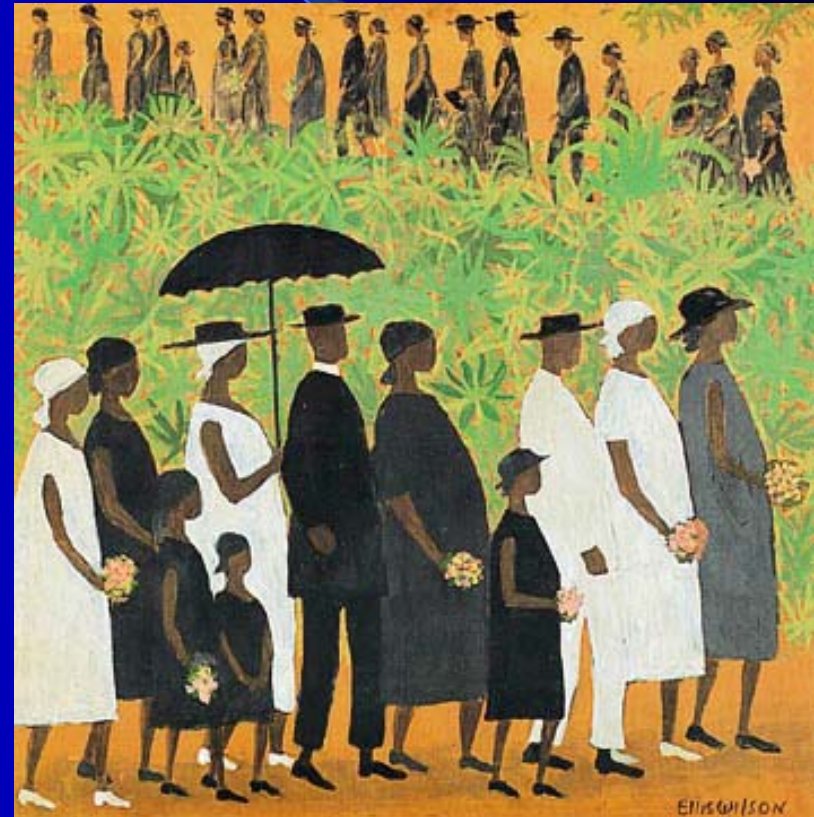


- *Functional Loss* – loss of abilities through chronic, degenerative conditions, accidents, or aging
- Such functional losses may lead to other losses –such as the loss of a driver’s license

# Physical or Tangible Loss

## *Death*

- Validated Losses
- Disenfranchised Losses
  - Relations not recognized
  - Losses not recognized
  - Life Cycle Issues (Sibling)
- Secondary Losses



# Physical or Tangible Loss

## *Non-Death*



- Loss of Relationship
  - Divorce
  - Separation/Alienation
  - Adoption/Foster Care
- Loss of Property
- Loss of Function

# Psychosocial Loss

- Can be defined as experiencing the loss of the *persona* of the other
- Examples include:
  - Dementia
  - Mental Illness
  - Accident
  - Substance Abuse/Recovery
  - Religious Conversion



# Anticipatory Grief



- Initial formulations
- Criticisms
- Rando's redefinition of *anticipatory mourning*
- Anticipatory grief as functional and psychosocial loss
- Past, present, and future
- Experienced by patient, family, and staff
- Cancer as example

# Symbolic Losses

## *Loss of Safety or Security*

- Trauma and the loss of the Assumptive World
- Personal Trauma
- Societal Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma and Professional Loss



# THE FAMILY CIRCUS by Bill Keane



4-26

© 1997 by Keane, Inc.  
All rights reserved.

*Bill Keane*

"...and last but not least, Dear Lord, take care of yourself. If you don't, we're all in trouble."

# The Stockholm Syndrome

- We bind quickly in times of stress  
(Fulton)

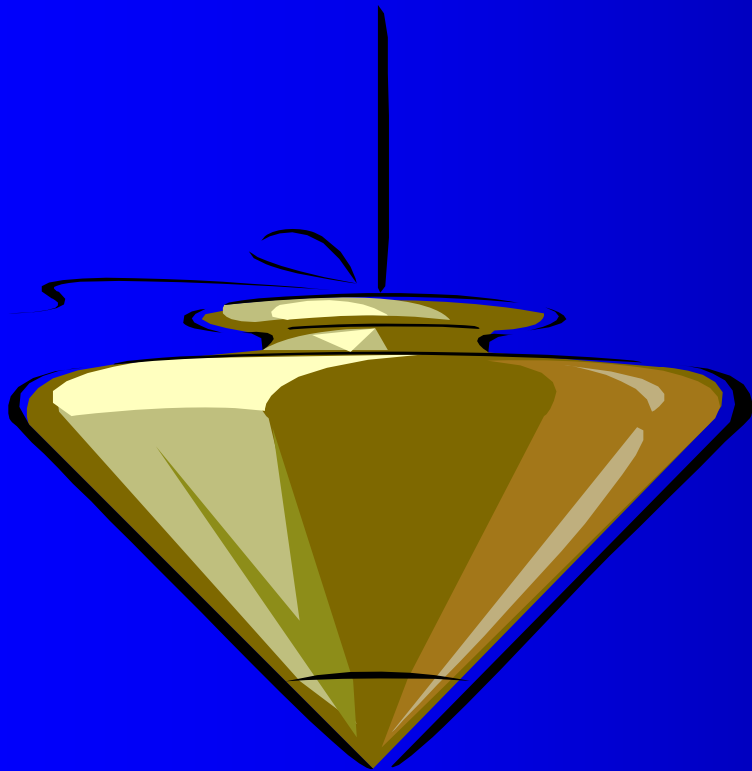


# Caregivers Experience Multiple Losses



- Loss of a Patient
- Loss of a Relationship with Family
- Perhaps Personal Future or Past Losses
- Loss of Assumptive World
- Unmet Goals
- Death of Self

# Papadatou's Model of Caregiver Grief



Simultaneously  
experiencing and  
containing grief

# Symbolic Losses

## *Loss of Identity*

- As a secondary loss
- Loss of culture
- Job loss
- Infertility



# Symbolic Losses

## *Existential Loss*



- Loss of dreams – including economic hopes, loss of a home etc.
- Loss of faith or beliefs
  - St. John of the Cross
  - Zinner article
- Loss of faith in a spiritual leader
- Loss of religious community

# Ambiguous Loss

- A concept by Pauline Boss
- Refers to losses where it is unclear if and what one has lost
- Such losses can have transgenerational implications

**HAVE YOU SEEN ME ?**



**MISSING**

Name: Tyrone Tanous  
DOB: 09/25/1957  
Ht.: 5', 11" Wt.: 175lbs  
Sex: M  
Date Missing: 06/13/1984  
From: Brooklyn, NY

please call 1000-946-4838

# Helpful Concepts



# Assumptive World



- A concept developed by Parkes and expanded by Janoff-Bulmann
- We assume the world is benevolent, fair and meaningful, and that self has value
- Losses that challenge these assumptions create trauma and grief

# The Psychology of Loss

- John Harvey has proposed a psychology of loss focusing on the ways that individuals reconstruct life and find meaning in loss
- Sought to study loss as a generic concept



# Chronic Sorrow/ Nonfinite Loss



- *Chronic Sorrow* – a concept developed by S. Roos (2002)
- *Nonfinite Loss* – Developed by Bruce and Schultz (2001)

# Chronic Sorrow/Nonfinite Loss

- *A set of pervasive, profound, continuing, and reoccurring grief responses resulting from a significant loss or absence of crucial aspects of self or another to whom there is a deep attachment (Roos)*
- *Grief that persists and changes as aspects of life continually fall short of expectations (Bruce & Schultz)*



# Chronic Sorrow/ Nonfinite Loss

- Refers to losses that families live with throughout time. Sorrow may spike at different times in the life cycle.
- Examples
  - Developmental Disabilities
  - Disabilities caused by injury or other impairments such as stroke
  - Progressive chronic diseases (etc. MS, Cystic Fibrosis)



# Chronic Sorrow/ Nonfinite Loss



- Reactions to such losses can include:
  - Disillusionment
  - Aloneness
  - Vulnerability
  - Inequity

# Disenfranchised Grief

A loss that cannot be socially sanctioned, openly acknowledged or publicly mourned (Doka, 1989; 2002)



“You know, we’re just not reaching that guy.”

# Beyond Feeling Rules

- It is acceptable to grieve the deaths of family members

# Disenfranchised Grief

The Right to Grief

# The Dimensions of Disenfranchised Grief

- Sociological
- Intrapsychic (Kauffman)
- Political (Attig)
- Interactional
  - Neimeyer & Jordan “Empathic Failure”

# Socio-Political Dimension of Disenfranchised Grief



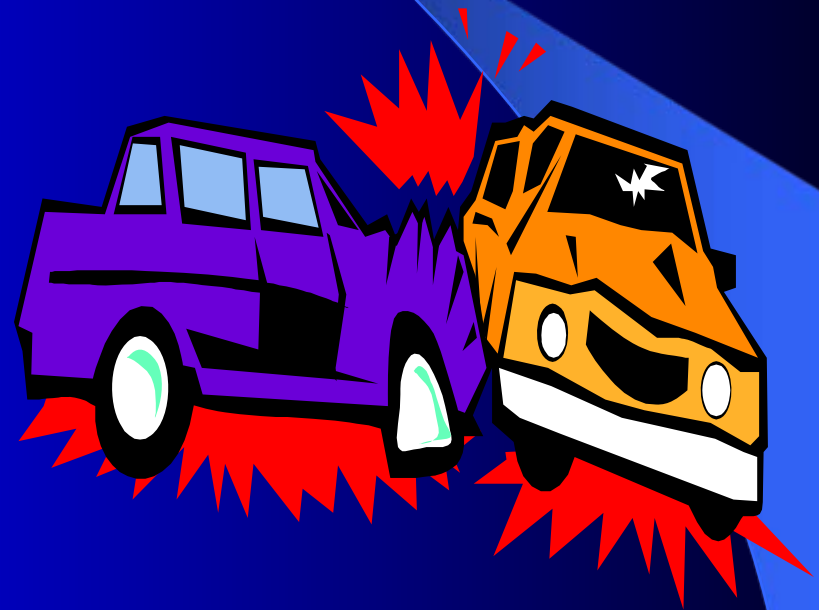
- Cultural feeling rules assign sympathy to victims considered “above reproach”. This process is influenced by class, race, and ethnicity. (Martin, 2005)

# Contexts of Disenfranchised Grief

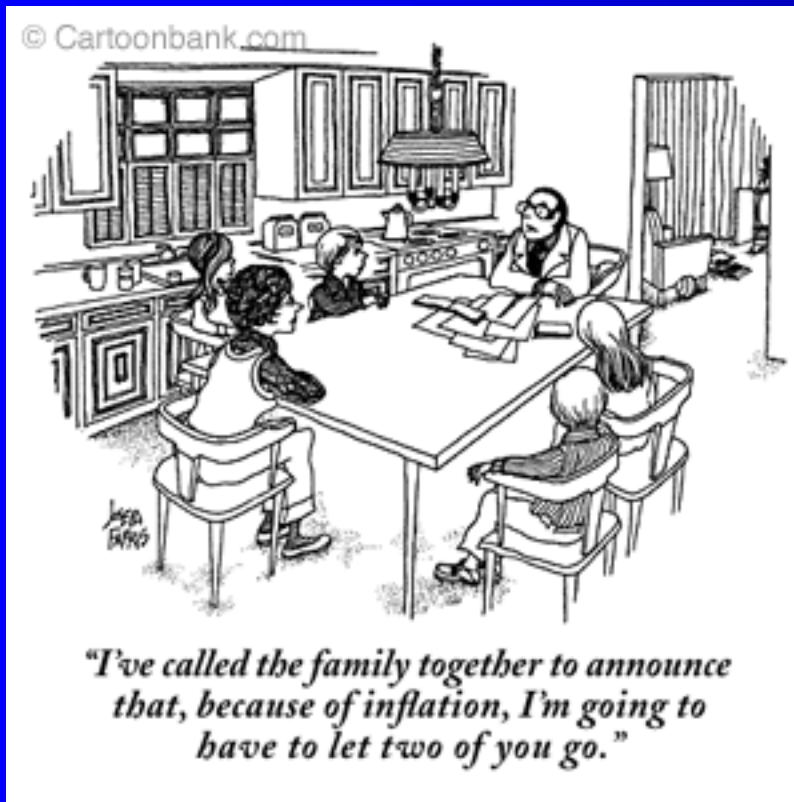
- Relationship is not recognized
- Loss is not acknowledged
- Griever is not recognized
- Disenfranchised deaths
- Ways individuals grieve

# Disenfranchised Trauma

- In traumatic events such as car crashes, individuals may grieve over injuries or fatalities even when they are not legally culpable
- Such grief may be disenfranchised by significant others as well as by the demands of an adversarial legal system



# Forbidden Grief



- To Stein (2009), forbidden grief is disallowed –rather than not socially supported. His example is employees after restructuring forbidden to grief the loss of “deadwood”
- Other examples might include
  - Martyrs
  - Executed “traitors” in a totalitarian régime

# Grief Counseling

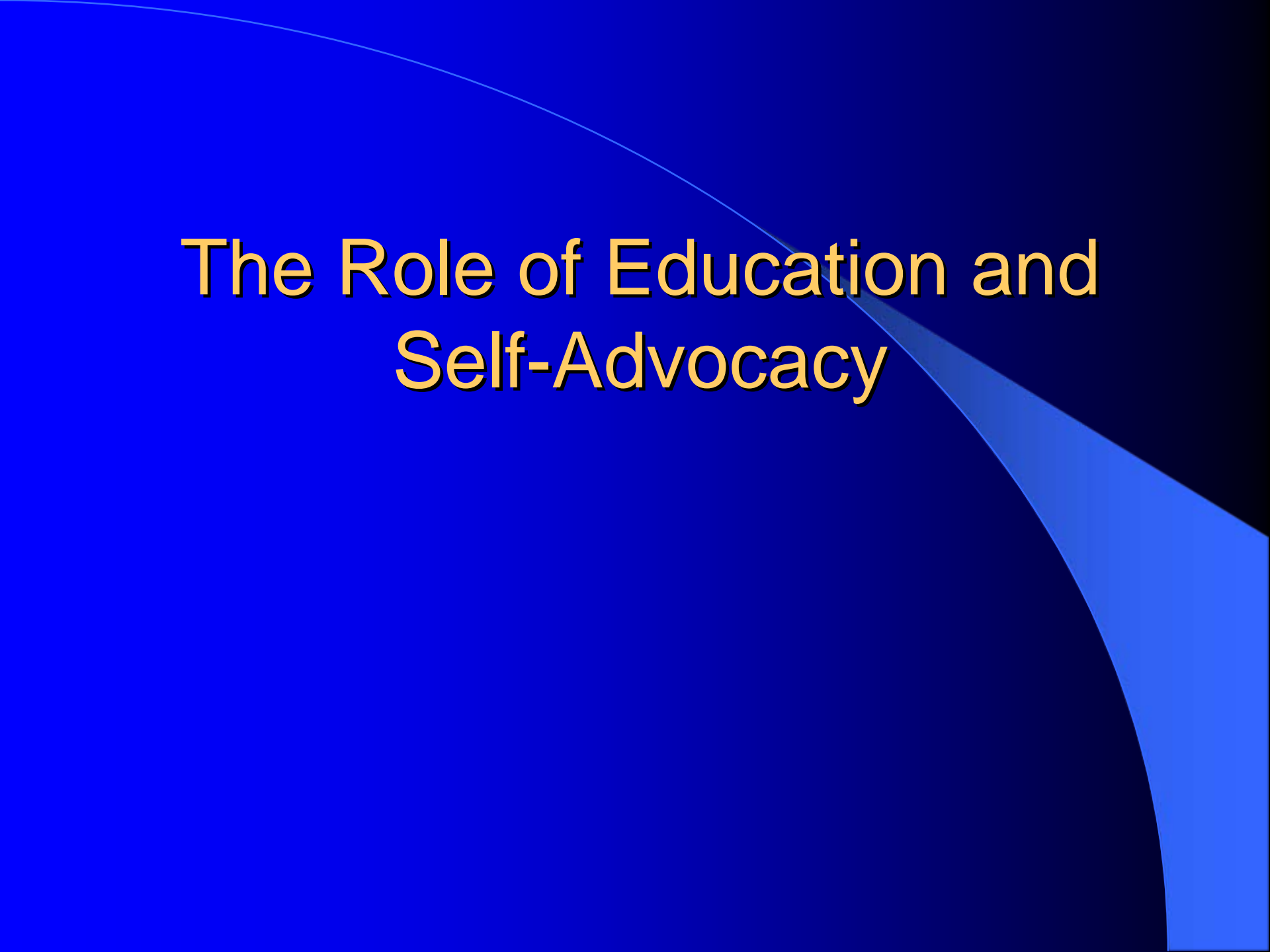
## Counseling Persons with Loss



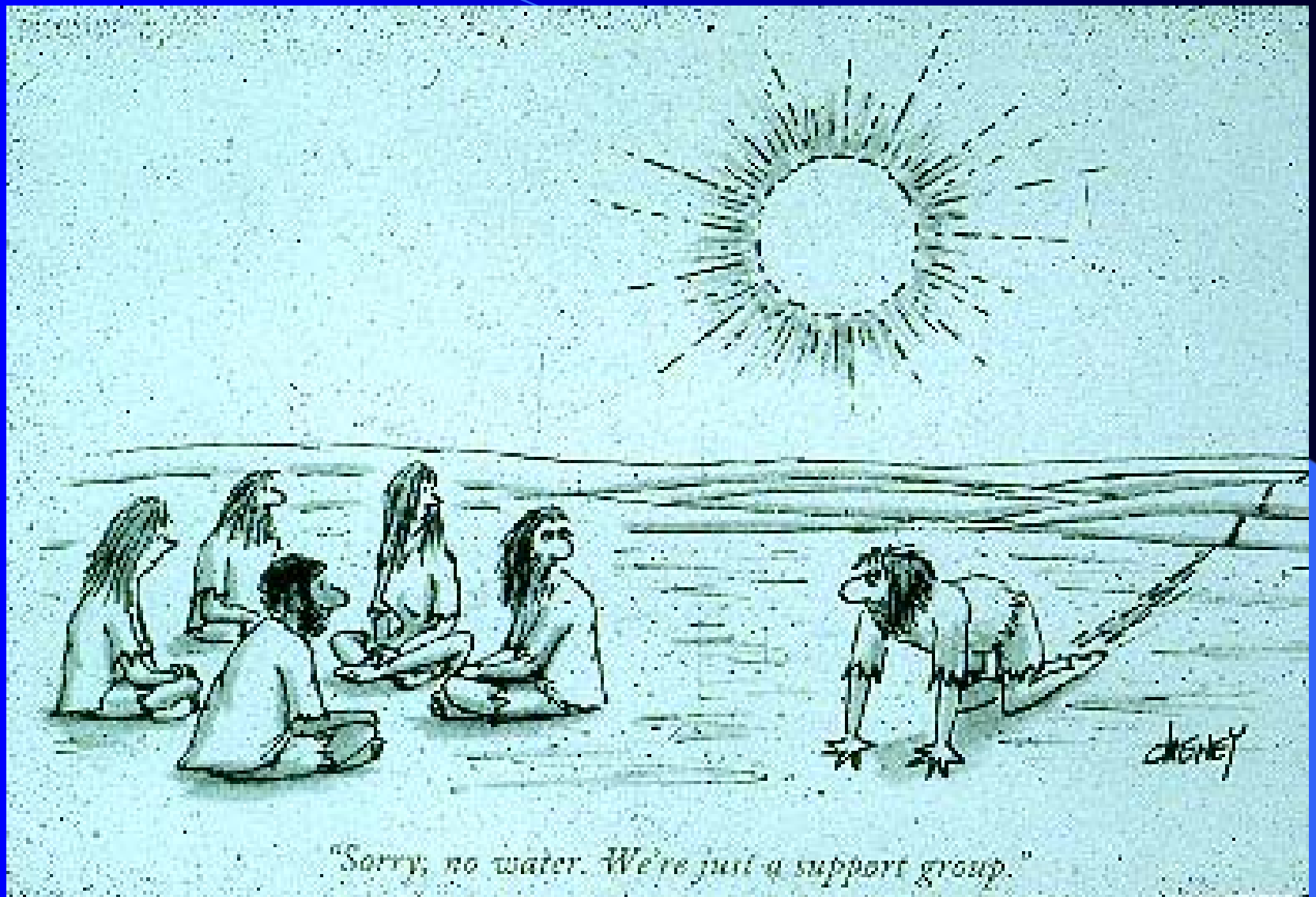
# Sensitivity to Loss

**Validation**

# The Role of Education and Self-Advocacy

The background is a dark blue gradient. A thin, light blue curved line starts from the top left and arcs across the upper half of the slide. A larger, semi-transparent blue triangular shape is positioned on the right side, pointing towards the center.

# Analyze Empathic Failure



# Counter Empathic Failure

- Counseling
- Support Groups
- Therapeutic Ritual

# Remember!

Loss = Grief

# Grief is manifested in many ways

- Physically
- Emotionally (including positive emotions)
- Cognitively
- Behaviorally
- Spiritually

# The Grief Process

## A Roller Coaster of Reactions



Grief is not a time bound  
process that ends in  
detachment

# Amelioration of Grief

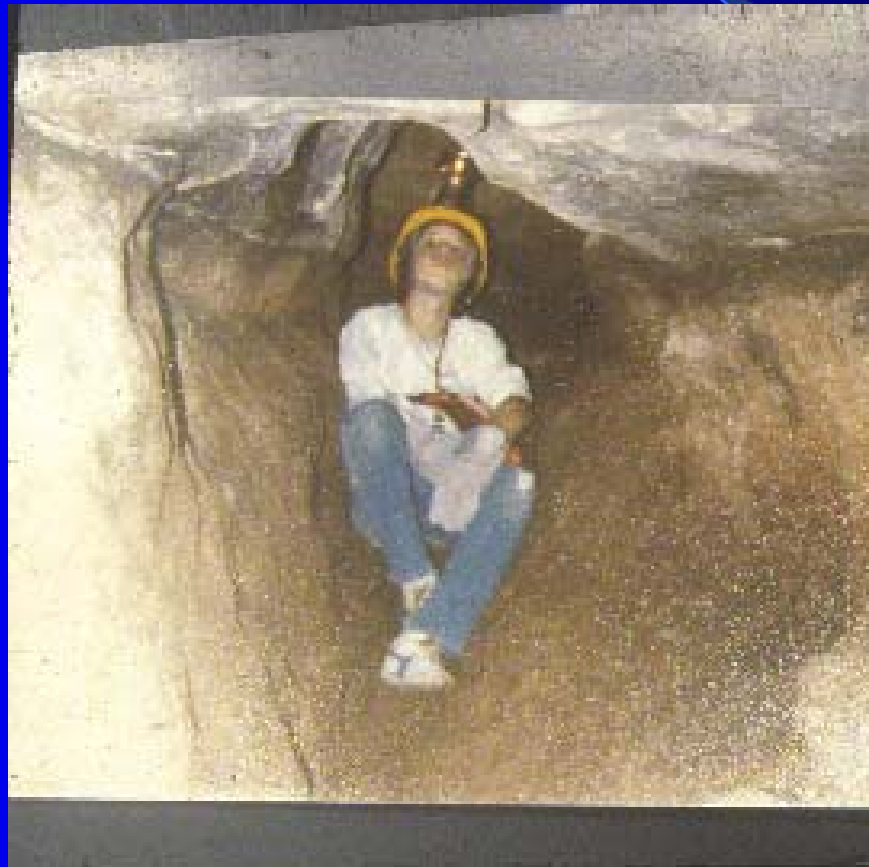
- Over time the intensity of grief reactions lessen
- Persons function at similar (or sometimes better levels) than prior to the loss
- Yet, grief still has a developmental aspect

# The Tasks of Grief

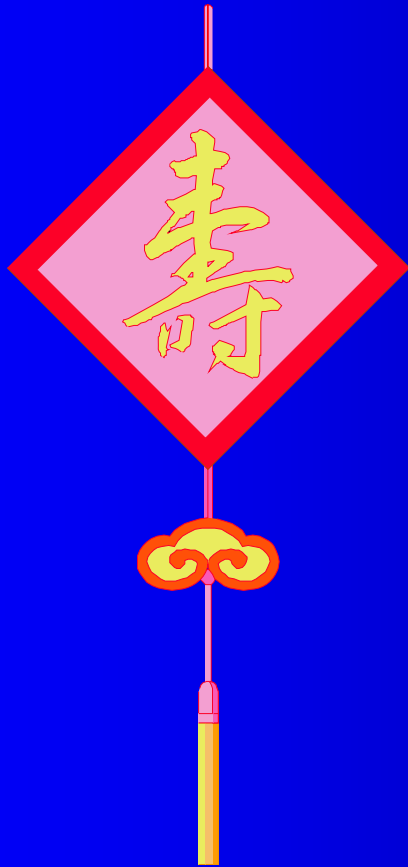
- Acknowledge the loss
- Express manifest and latent emotion
- Adjust to a changed life
- Relocate the loss
- Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss

Worden (Modified)

# Grief as a Transformative Process



# Loss as a Transforming Event



- Crises offers Challenge and Opportunity.

# Transformative Grief

- In Celtic Mythology, *thin places* are places where the boundaries between this world and the other world are permeable
- In a sense, grief exists within this thin place



# Significant or Traumatic Loss



- Significant or traumatic losses are seismic events that not only cause emotional distress but challenge beliefs, goals, and one's sense of personal narrative
- Life is now divided into before and after the event  
(Calhoun & Tedeschi)

# Catherine Sanders

Professionally and personally offered  
a model of grief as a transformative  
force

# Sanders' Phases of Grief

- Shock
- Awareness of Loss
- Conservation – Withdrawal

# Choices in the Conservation- Withdrawal Phase

- To die
- To maintain the status quo
- The decision to change

# Sanders' Phases (Con't)

- The Turning Point
- Renewal
- A suggested “Sixth Phase” – Fulfillment

# The Mysterious Math of Grief

- $3-1=2$
- $3-1=0$
- $3-1=5$

# Parental Loss and Achievement

Motivation a “will to power and  
control”

*Eisenstadt*

# Blooming Widows

Widows who are socially constrained  
may be pushed into greater self-  
reliance with rise in sense of self-  
esteem

Calhoun & Tedeschi

# Possible Changes

- Renewed Spirituality
- Greater Appreciation of Life, Relationships, and Priorities
- Growth in Character – Perceptions of Strength
- Existential Awareness
- Growth in Skills
- Changes in Lifestyle

Calhoun & Tedeschi



# Grief Counseling



- Studies show that clients will do better in groups when leaders have transformation rather than coping as a goal of therapy or support

# How Can We Enhance Transformation?

- Language of Survivorship
- Small choices empower bigger ones
- Examination of positive and negative adaptations
- Reflection “How has this loss changed you?”
- The value of “benefit finding” in the experience of grief

# Looking Backward



- What is lost?
- What is left?
- Reviewing strengths
  - Internal
  - External

# Looking Forward



- What do I need to bring from my old life into my new life?
- What do I need to leave behind?
- What do I need to add?

# The Value of Bibliotherapy

- Validation
- Suggestions for Coping
- Learn coping techniques
- Hope
- Be prescriptive!



# Support Groups

- Validation
- Ventilation
- Respite and Support
- Learn Coping Techniques
- Hope

# Support Groups – Possible Danger

The Danger of Shared  
Anguish in a poorly  
led group

The Need for an Intake  
Process



# Developing Groups for Instrumental Grievers

- Whose needs are being met?
- The importance of needs assessment



# THE WIZARD OF ID

by Brant Parker and Johnny Hart



# Traditional Models May Not Meet the Needs of All Dealing with Loss

- Adventure-Based Groups
- Discussion and Reading Groups
- Educational Seminars
- Informal Groups (Sharing Wives' Recipes)
- Problem-Solving Groups (Parents without Partners)
- Expressive Art Groups

# Men's Groups

- The Harvard Bereavement study suggested that fathers were best served by offering a group on how to be good single parents – rather than offering emotional support (Worden, 2008)



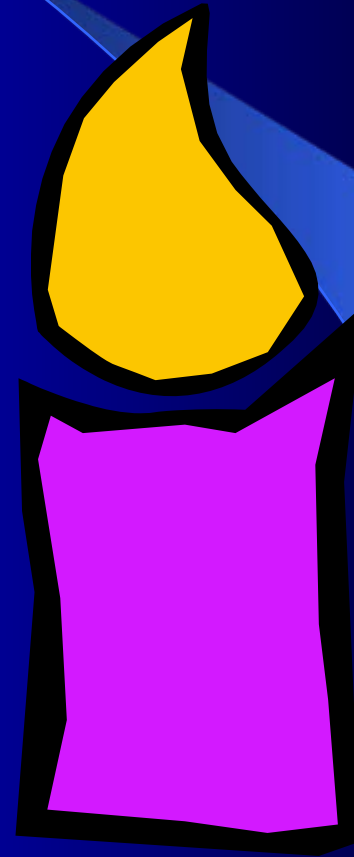
# Utilizing Rituals

- Ritual as liminal
- The historical value of ritual
- Creating therapeutic rituals



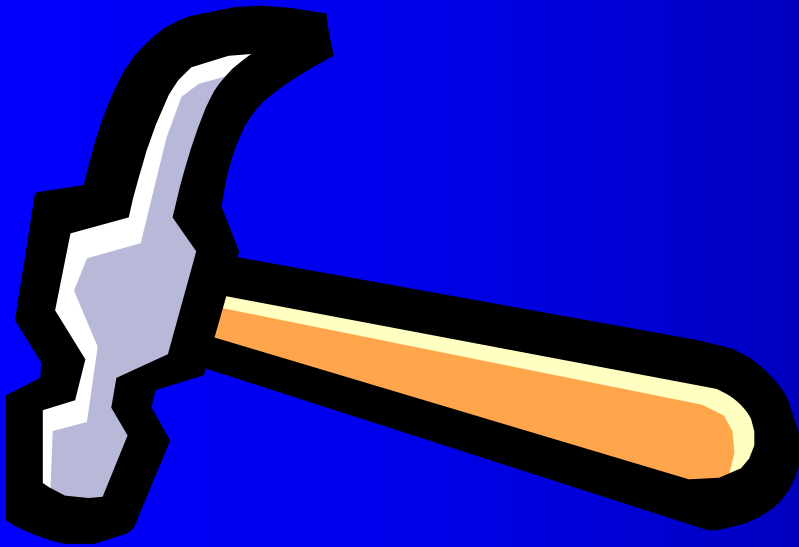
# Types of Ritual

- Continuity



# Types of Ritual

- Transition



# Types of Ritual

- Reconciliation



# Types of Ritual

- Affirmation



# Developing Meaningful Rituals

- Emerge from the narrative
- Objects are both visible and symbolic
- Planned and processed
- Use primal elements

# Resilience as a Pattern

- Some people have a comparatively limited reaction to loss
- Part is situational – Resilient grievers had fewer losses or other stress, death not sudden so chance to say goodbye, intrinsic spirituality, and good psychological health – loss as a challenge



# Resilient Grievers



- Had an optimistic mindset
- Responded to challenges
- A belief that even in the worst things, they could learn and grow
- Engendered positive memories

# The Many Dimensions of Loss

- As grief counselors we can assist persons in reconstructing lives and finding new meaning whatever the loss



# Frank and Ernest



Copyright (c) 1996 by Thaves. Distributed from [www.thecomics.com](http://www.thecomics.com).