

**Surviving A Loss:  
Underlying Grief's  
Role In Recovery**

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**My Experience:  
Patient and Family Experience:**

<b>20 Years as a Hospital Medical Social Worker</b>	<b>24 Years in Private Practice &amp; Addiction Outpatient Clinic Grief Consulting at The Meadows, Alta Mira &amp; Claudia Black Center</b>
HIV/AIDS Patients Heart Transplant Team	Barrow's Neurological Institute
<b>Patients and Families</b>	
There are as many styles of grieving as there are people.	Reactions are dictated by circumstances.

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**+ Presentation Takeaways:**

- Recognize the differences between complicated, chronic and delayed grief.
- Understand the differences in grieving styles.

Explain the link between grief, mental health and addiction.

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**+ I Have Some Questions.....**

STAND UP      SIT DOWN

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## + Why Is This Important??

- The Common Experience.
- In the U.S. 8 million people will suffer through the loss of an immediate family member every year.
- There are 800,000 widows/widowers each year.
- USA COVID deaths 1.04M of our loved ones and 6.45 million worldwide.
- Divorce rate ranges from 40-67% depending on the state.
- There are 104 fatal MVA's in the US everyday.
- 1.2 million children will lose a parent. We lose 22 Veterans to suicide every day.
- Impact on mental health, addiction issues and trauma history.

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## + Grief/Loss Models:

### *Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: 5 Stages of Grief*

- Shock and Denial
- Sadness
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Acceptance
  - *Many more models followed.*
  - *The Magic Question...*

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## Recovery as a Grief Process:

- **Shock & Denial:** A necessary stage, gives us a chance to get use to an overwhelming idea.
- Client may say: "I am unsure I have a problem", "I don't drink and drive", "I don't bother anyone.."
- Stuck in "the misery that they know." Lack of understanding may be related to fear of change.
- **Sadness:** Giving up a "friend", something that helped them feel or not feel. Loss of the comfort of their addiction or numbness.
- Sadness about not being "normal". Not able to be a social drinker.

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## Recovery as a Grief Process:

- **Bargaining:** "I Wish, I Wish, What If, What If"
- Negotiating circumstances to make the substance use okay.
- "I could just drink on the weekend.."
- Making adjustments to satisfy spouse, work or self. Minimizing, justifying behaviors to make it a non-issue.
- **Anger:** Can be directed at anyone, especially those closes to us, anger at God/Higher Power. Anger about having to change or go to treatment.
- Blaming: "If my job didn't stress me out I wouldn't have to drink or use"
- Anger at self for getting into this situation and the consequences and wreckage.

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## + Recovery as a Grief Process:

- **Acceptance:** Where we hope to end up.
- Acceptance of: Recovery as a part of life and who I am.
- Accept never being able to go back to use.
- A settling in your soul.
- No longer emotional overwhelmed by this reality.
- **Getting Stuck:**
- We will move up and down thru these stages, feelings and behaviors and many more.
- We may become stuck in any of them.

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## + The Challenges of Grief for those in Recovery:

- Risk of Relapse
- Shifting of support system
- Using to avoid or numb feelings
- Using to be in touch with feelings and emotive feelings
- Unexpected changes that come with loss
- May blame themselves
- Feelings of helplessness
- Increased anxiety or depression symptoms
- Inability to be present at the time of loss.
- Tendency to stuff feelings
- *Randy's Story....*

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## Complicated Grief

Defined:

*“An abnormal grief reaction, the intensification of grief to a level such that the person is overwhelmed, resorts to maladaptive behavior or remains interminably in a state of grief without progression of the mourning process towards completion.” (Worden, 1991)*

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## Complicated Grief

Complicated grief may occur when any of the following are present:

- Sudden or unanticipated loss/death.
- Death following a long illness.
- Loss of a child.
- A troubled pre-morbid relationship.
- Multiple losses.
- Violent death.
- Perceived issues of preventability or randomness.
- Mental illness prior to death.
- Lack of social support.
- Feelings of guilt or resentment.
- Lack of Closure.

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## Chronic Grief:

Define:

*“An on-going, prolonged experience with no significant reduction in emotional distress. Experienced pain and sadness that is triggered by events.*

*Inability to move through the grief process due to on-going circumstances such as chronic life issues or health conditions. “*

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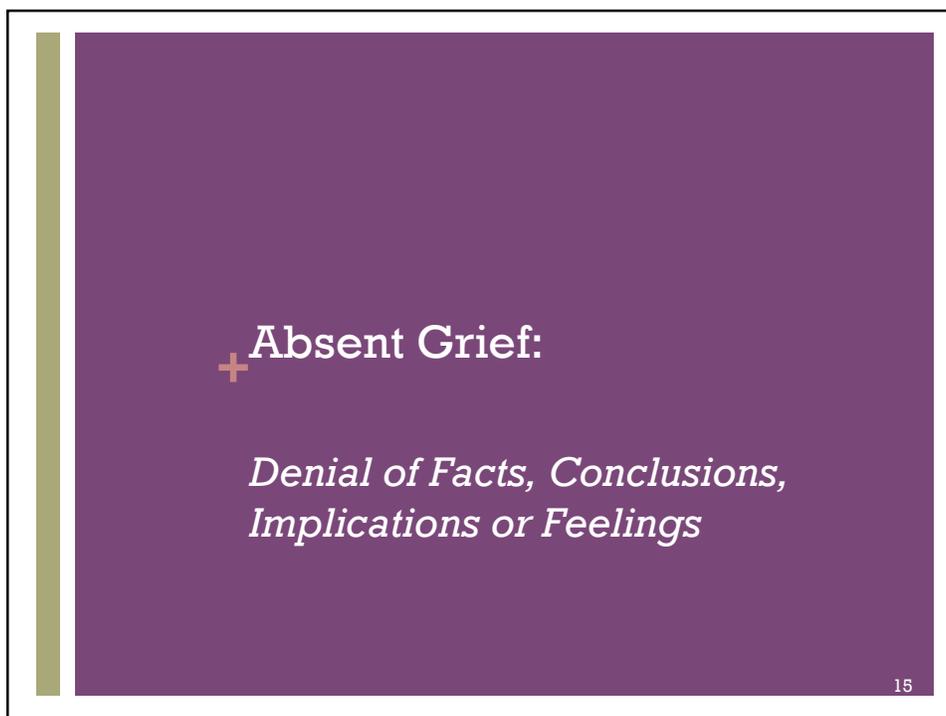
## Delayed Grief:

Define: Inability to experience loss at this time.

Due to:

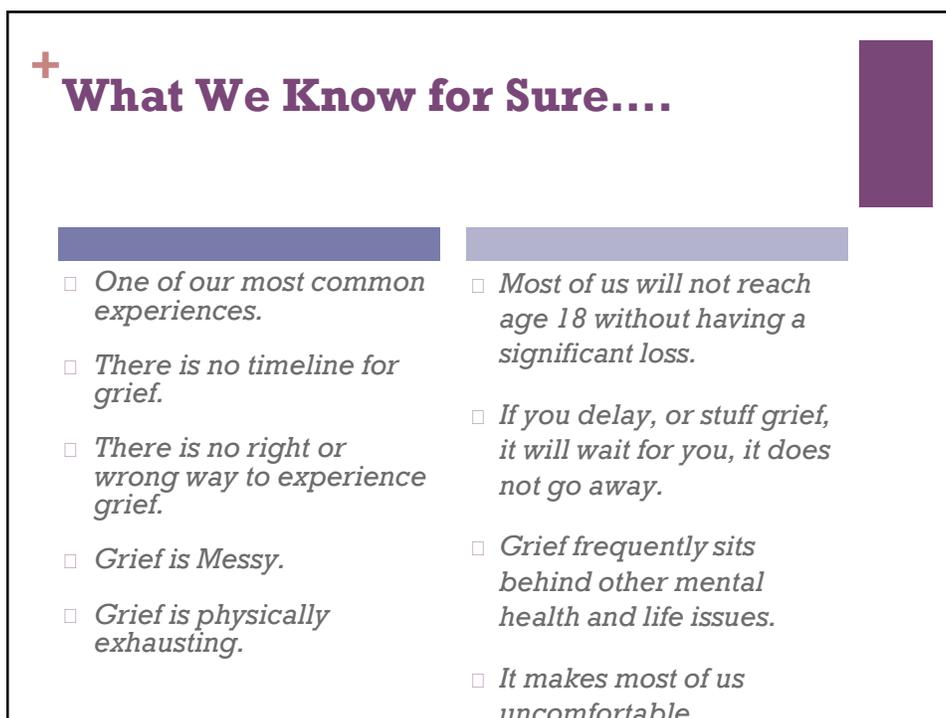
- + Timing/Waiting for proof.
- Family roles and responsibility.
- Age/Right Grieving Environment.
- Substance Use.
- Emotional Instability.
- Previous Loss.
- Fear loss of control.

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A slide with a purple background and a vertical olive-green bar on the left. The text is centered and reads: "Absent Grief: Denial of Facts, Conclusions, Implications or Feelings". A small orange plus sign is to the left of the title. The number "15" is in the bottom right corner.

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A slide with a white background and a purple bar on the right. The title "What We Know for Sure...." is in purple. Below it are two columns of bulleted points, each with a colored bar above it (dark blue on the left, light blue on the right).

- One of our most common experiences.
- There is no timeline for grief.
- There is no right or wrong way to experience grief.
- Grief is Messy.
- Grief is physically exhausting.
- Most of us will not reach age 18 without having a significant loss.
- If you delay, or stuff grief, it will wait for you, it does not go away.
- Grief frequently sits behind other mental health and life issues.
- It makes most of us uncomfortable.

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**+** **My Soap Box** 😊  
***Advanced Directives — Get Um!!***

- Living Wills
- They simply state your wishes.
- Keeps your family off the hook!!
- Information and documents can be found on the Arizona Attorney General website under "Life Care Planning Packet"
- Power of Attorney
- Medical Power
- Durable/Financial Power
- Mental Health
- These allow someone to be in charge of medical and financial decisions

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**+** **Grieving Styles**  
***Family Roles:***

- The Responsible Family Member.
- The Clown or Entertainer.
- The Emotionally Overwhelmed.
- The Caretaker.
- The Numbed Out.

***The Problem:*** Little respect for others grief styles.

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## + The Things People Say.....

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- Not Helpful:**
  - They had a full life.
  - He/She is in a better place.
  - He/She brought this on themselves.
  - Aren't you over this yet? It's been a while.
  - You can still have another child.
  - God wanted him/her to be with them.
  - I know how you feel.
  - Be strong.
- Best Things to Say:**
  - I am sorry for your loss.
  - I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in anyway.
  - My favorite memory of them is...
  - Give a hug instead of saying anything.
  - I am here for you.
  - Just be present.
  - You are in my thoughts and prayers.

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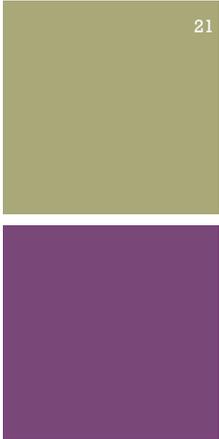
## + Judgement:

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**Beware of leading with your own belief and grieving preferences**

- When we grieve, we grieve individually, as a family, as a community and as a society.
- Our responsibility is to ask questions and remain open and curious about each persons culture and grieving style.
- Not everyone follows the "rules" of their family, religion or culture.

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### + The Unexplainable.....

There are experiences that griever's have that just can not be explained. If you are open and trusted, you will hear these stories.

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### + The Unexplainable.....



“The Visit”

- Many people will experience something they can't explain and may keep it to themselves.
- These experiences can shape our pain, our understanding, our ability to move on and may provide relief.
- The more I share my experience, the more I hear from others.
- This is normal!

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## + Mental Health Impacts:

- Anxiety, including fear of death
- Increased Depression
- Isolation
- Detachment from others
- Relationship tension
- Family cohesion or disconnection.
- Re-thinking life goals/self reflection or self examination.
- New energy around healthy lifestyles.
- Increased fear vs. brazen attitudes.
- Shift in priorities.
- Adjustment to what is important.

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## + Mental Health Impact:

- Increase use of substances as a form of coping.
- Stuffing or emoting feelings.
- Discomfort with being in "limbo".
- Recognition of mortality.
- Anger to action.
- Pack only what you need.
- Bottom line: grief changes us.

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## + Introduction to The Five Written Expressions of Grief™

- Developed over the last 25 plus years.
- Can be applied to all kinds of losses.
- Helps those who feel overwhelmed, or stuck.
- Helps griever's honor their Loved Ones.

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## The Power of the Pen: Journaling

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## + Effective Use of the Process:

- Grieving loss of Loved Ones.
- Loss of a tumultuous relationship.
- Loss of memory of Loved One.
- Loss of physical or mental/emotional health.
- Making peace with toxic or absent parental relationships.
- Loss of self.
- Trans clients.
- Loss of marriage/partnership.
- Loss of time in addiction or grieving your substance.

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## + Actions You Can Take:

- Journaling your thoughts and feelings can be therapeutic.
- Seek medication support from your PCP or Psychiatrist.
- Decrease alcohol consumption, it effects your ability to be present.
- Manage your physical health (blood pressure, chronic pain, blood sugar levels).
- Exercise. It increases the good chemicals in your brain.
- Seek counseling, individual, family or couples.
- Prioritize your self-care.
- Lead by example, show your feelings, speak your truth.

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## + Actions You Can Take:

- Balance life, make room for what's important.
- Avoid isolation. Don't worry about burdening others.
- Sleep! We function better, physically and emotionally with rest.
- Set boundaries. Protect your precious time and energy.
- Practice saying "No." It's not a dirty word.
- Pray, meditate.
- Bereavement groups are available through Hospice, hospitals and community services.
- Talk to Clergy.

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## + Actions You Can Take:

- Find your new normal.
- Be kind, gentle and patient with yourself while grieving.
- Remember, it's okay to embrace life and live fully.

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## + Take Aways...

- Be conscious of your personal style of grieving to avoid impact on the grievers styles.
- Stay curious and ask questions about others culture, family, spiritual and individual beliefs around grief and death and dying. Let them lead.
- Be open and non-judgmental about The Unexplainable.

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## + Take Aways:

- Add questions about grief and losses as part of your assessment.
- Grief is complicated and we all react differently.
- Use The Five Written Expressions to assist clients progress through trauma, relationship problems, recovery....
- Be conscious of your style of grieving to avoid impact on clients style and process.
- Get those Advance Directives!!
- Remember, the gift of grief is our opportunity to live fully, be present, and be inspired by those who have left us.

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## Recommended Readings:

**“Me After You: Surviving The Loss of A Loved One”  
Gigi Veasey, LCSW, LISAC, CCBT**

- “Death: The Final Stages of Growth”—Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
- “Life After Loss: A Practical Guide to Renewing Your Life After a Major Loss”—Bob Delts
- “On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Grief” Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
- “The Year of Magical Thinking”—Joan Didion
- “The Courage to Grieve”—Judy Tatelbaum
- “Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief”—Martha Whitmore Hickman
- “How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies”—Therese A. Rando

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