

Psychosocial Spiritual Alberta Community of Practice: How To Care, What To Say: Talking About Grief and Loss

Presenter:

Becky Van Tassel, BSW, RSW, M.Ed., Grief Education

Facilitator:

Sheila Killoran, Education Lead, Covenant Health Palliative Institute

Host:

Ellen Mi, Project Coordinator, Covenant Health Palliative Institute

Date:

February 20th, 2025



The Palliative Care ECHO Project

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is a five-year national initiative to cultivate communities of practice and establish continuous professional development among health care providers across Canada who care for patients with life-limiting illness.

Stay connected: www.echopalliative.com



Disclosures

The Palliative Care Public Awareness project is funded by the Government of Alberta. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Alberta.



Reminders

- This session is being recorded.
- Please do not disclose any personal health information during the session.
- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you'd like to speak at that time.
- If you experience technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat.



Palliative Care - Canada
BY
Pallium Canada



How to Care What to Say: Talking about Grief and Loss

Becky Van Tassel BSW RSW, M.Ed

Grief Support Program



**The Bob Glasgow Grief Support Centre
Richmond Road Diagnostic & Treatment Centre
3Rd Floor, 1820 Richmond Road SW**



Outcomes

After attending this training participants will report:

- Increased awareness of the importance of discussing grief and loss.
- Increase knowledge of practical strategies to provide quality care in “Forever Remembered” moments.
- Increased knowledge of video resources to support patients and families.

Caring for yourself

We will all have experienced some form of loss. This session may bring up feelings of grief.

- ☞ Give yourself permission to feel
- ☞ Be gentle with yourself
- ☞ Look after your physical health
- ☞ Grief triggers or grief bursts are normal



What can positive bereavement care achieve?

Clinicians that are confident and comfortable in providing meaningful bereavement care have a higher sense of satisfaction in their work and this can be a protective factor for compassion fatigue (Fan & Lin, 2021).

While grief is a normal and natural occurrence, it can be complicated by the care received at the End of Life (Selman, Choa, Sowden, & Marshall, 2020).

The process of Advanced Care Planning can impact the family and loved one's grief experiences. End of Life conversations can be considered a “blessing” when these wishes are carried out (Bandelini, 2022)

What are your fears and beliefs about discussing death and loss with clients?



Common Fears and Beliefs

- Do not want to say the wrong thing
- Do not want to bring up grief, as they are worried they are not prepared to deal with the potential reaction
- Unsure how to respond to high degrees of emotions
- Unsure of how to respond in the moment and want to give people privacy in their grief
- Worried that they do not have the skills or capacity to discuss these things

(Fan, & Lin, 2021) (Selman, Choa, Sowde, & Marshall, 2020)

© 2023 Alberta Health Services, Calgary Grief Support



Forever Remembered Stories

In small groups please
chat about a time when
you were part of a
patient's Forever
Remembered story.
How did it feel?



Our Essential Message

When we are exposed to human pain it is natural to want to heal hurt and relieve suffering – our instinctive desire to fix, cure and make whole again is strong.

**Grief support is more about
“being with” than “doing for”
Companioning not Curing**

© 2023 Alberta Health Services, Calgary Grief Support



Grounding yourself first....





How to Care

- Be present
- Take a moment to breathe
- Ask “would a _____ be helpful right now”
- Small things can go a long way (toothbrushes, blanket)
- Be honest and prepare people for the reality of what they may experience as their loved one nears the end of their life
- Listen
- Ask about their loved one and their life
- Do not avoid talking about their loss

(Ellis, Chebsey, Storey, Bradley, Jackson, Flenady, Haezell, & Siassakos, 2016)

Video Resources

[Grief Resources - YouTube](#)

Final Thoughts

- Be prepared for various grief reactions
- Listen without judging
- Be present and show that you care
- Normalize and validate feelings
- Accept that I don't have all the answers...but I can still be present
- Facilitate coordination of care according to your role or refer to the appropriate area



Check out





Thank you!!!!

- Please complete an evaluation, for more questions or conversations email me at Becky.VanTassel@albertahealthservices.ca

References

- Avis, K. A., Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (2021). Stages of grief portrayed on the internet: A systematic analysis and critical appraisal. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.772696>
- Bandini, J. I. (2020). Beyond the hour of Death: Family experiences of grief and bereavement following an end-of-life hospitalization in the intensive care unit. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 26(3), 267–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459320946474>
- Boerner, K., Burack, O. R., Jopp, D. S., & Mock, S. E. (2015). Grief after patient death: Direct care staff in nursing homes and Homecare. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 49(2), 214–222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2014.05.023>
- Douglass, L. L., Threlkeld, A., & Merriweather, L. R. (2022). *Trauma in adult and Higher Education Conversations and critical reflections*. Information Age Publishing.

References

- Ellis, A., Chebsey, C., Storey, C., Bradley, S., Jackson, S., Flenady, V., Heazell, A., & Siassakos, D. (2016). Systematic review to understand and improve care after stillbirth: A review of parents' and healthcare professionals' experiences. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-016-0806-2>
- Fan, S.-Y., & Lin, W.-C. (2021). An educational bereavement program to decrease clinical staff's barriers and improve self-efficacy of providing bereavement care. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 30(1), 835–841. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-021-06497-y>
- Garcia, A. C., Ferreira, A. C., Silva, L. S., da Conceição, V. M., Nogueira, D. A., & Mills, J. (2022). Mindful self-care, self-compassion, and resilience among palliative care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 64(1), 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2022.03.003>
- Guité-Verret, A., Vachon, M., Ummel, D., Lessard, E., & Francoeur-Carron, C. (2021). Expressing grief through metaphors: Family caregivers' experience of care and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2021.1996872>

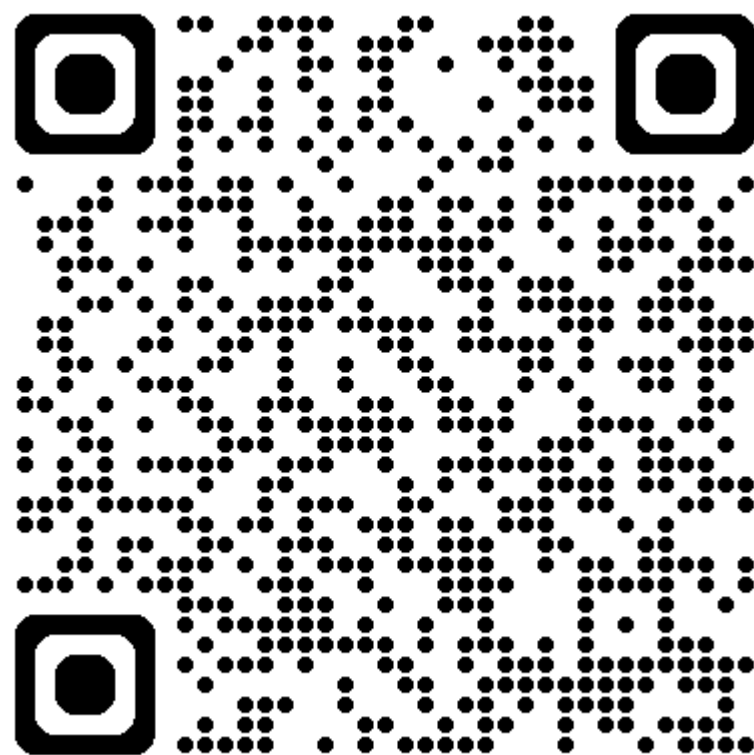
References

- Hernández-Fernández, C., & Meneses-Falcón, C. (2021). I can't believe they are dead. death and mourning in the absence of goodbyes during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13530>
- Harrington, J.A., & Neimeyer, R.A. (Eds.). (2020). *Superhero Grief: The Transformative Power of Loss* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429056666>
- Jonas-Simpson, C., Pilkington, F. B., MacDonald, C., & McMahan, E. (2013). Nurses' experiences of grieving when there is a perinatal death. *SAGE Open*, 3(2), 215824401348611. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013486116>
- Leone, R. A. (2020). Using ambiguous loss to address perceived control during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Counseling and Family Therapy Scholarship Review*. <https://doi.org/10.53309/zlpn6696>

References

- Leone, R. A. (2020). Using ambiguous loss to address perceived control during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Counseling and Family Therapy Scholarship Review*. <https://doi.org/10.53309/zlpn6696>
- Rabow, M. W., Huang, C.-H. S., White-Hammond, G. E., & Tucker, R. O. (2021). Witnesses and victims both: Healthcare Workers and grief in the time of covid-19. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 62(3), 647–656. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2021.01.139>
- Sunbul , Z. A., Malkoc, A., Goresli , M. A., Arslan, R., & Cekici , F. (n.d.). Mindful Self-Care Dimensions as Agents of Well-Being for Students in Mental Health Fields. *European Journal of Education Studies* , 5(5). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1469657>

Evaluation



[Psychosocial Spiritual Alberta
Community of Practice: How To Care,
What To Say](#)

Upcoming Session

Skill Building for Difficult Conversations

Date: March 20, 2025

Presenter: Kimberly Crosby, PhD., R.Psych, Registered Psychologist, Cross Cancer Institute

In this session we will explore communication skills for health care providers in palliative care. The presentation will explore patient experiences in palliative care, and their communication preferences. We will also discuss specific skills and strategies for communicating effectively with patients around difficult topics, including disease progression, goals of care and end-of-life.



Palliative Care - Canada



Covenant Health
Palliative Institute

Stay Connected



- Visit [Compassionate Alberta \(covenanthealth.ca\)](https://covenanthealth.ca) to access all our tools and resources.
- Please subscribe to our newsletter: [Palliative Institute | Compassionate Alberta newsletter](#)
- Contact us at: Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca



Thank You!

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is supported by a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada



Covenant Health
Palliative Institute

BY
Pallium Canada