

# Grief

## *A Systems-based Approach to Supporting Individuals Who Have Experienced Grief and Loss*

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# Acknowledging Loss

*“The deeper that sorrow carves into  
your being, the more joy you can  
contain.”*

*-On Joy and Sorrow by Khalil Gibran  
(1883-1931)*



# Definition and Characteristics of Grief and Bereavement

- Grief: The emotional, psychological, and behavioral response to a significant loss often the death of a loved one
- Bereavement: The state of having experienced that loss, specifically a loss due to death.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>

<https://dictionary.apa.org/bereavement>

## NATIONAL GRIEF Awareness Week

### What is grief?

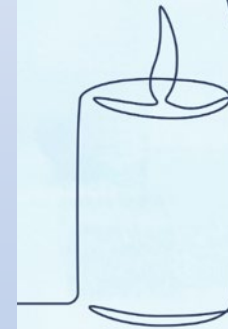
- The emotional, mental, and physical response to a loss.
- A natural process that can include a wide range of emotions.
- It is deeply personal, shaped by the nature of the relationship, cultural influences, and individual coping mechanisms.

*There is no correct way to grieve.*

### What does grief feel like?

Grief comes in many forms such as:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Confusion
- Guilt
- Denial
- Relief

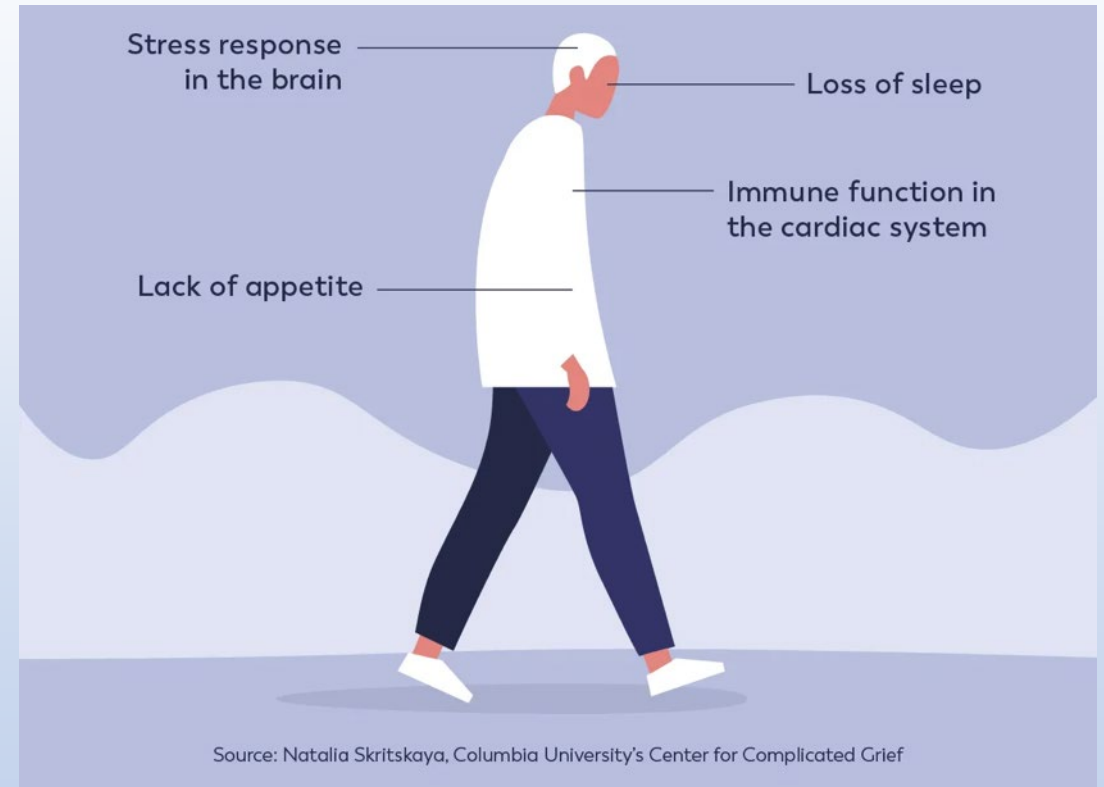


**SAMHSA**



# Challenging Consequences of Loss and Grief

- Complexity and uniqueness of grief
- Common types of difficult loss (death of a child, spouse)
- Mental health impacts
- Physical health impacts
- Social and relational consequences
- Special considerations for behavioral health



# Privatization of Grief in US

- Death shrouded in secrecy
- Isolation
- Limited time off





# Victorian Era Mourning Dress



# Other Cultural Rituals





# Prolonged-Grief Disorder

- Marked by persistent, pervasive, yearning, longing and preoccupation
- Persistent and Disruptive:
  - Identity disruption (such as feeling as though part of oneself has died).
  - Marked sense of disbelief about the death.
  - Avoidance of reminders that the person is dead.
  - Intense emotional pain (such as anger, bitterness, sorrow) related to the death.
  - Difficulty with reintegration (such as problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future).
  - Emotional numbness (absence or marked reduction of emotional experience).
  - Feeling that life is meaningless.
  - Intense loneliness (feeling alone or detached from others).



# PGD Treatment

- Evidence Based:
- Prolonged Grief Treatment (PGT)

Other modalities that may help:

- CBT for insomnia
- Bereavement support individual and groups
- EMDR
- Music & Art Therapy
- Individual bereavement support
- Mindfulness and Meditation

## H.E.A.L.I.N.G. Milestones

**H**onor your loved one and yourself; discover your own interests and values.

**E**ase emotional pain; Open yourself to emotions – both painful and pleasant ones; trust that you can deal with emotional pain; it doesn't control you.

**A**ccept grief and let it find a place in your life.

**L**earn to live with reminders of your loss.

**I**ntegrate memories of your loved one; let them enrich your life, and help you learn and grow.

**N**arrate stories of the death for yourself; share them with others.

**G**ather others around you; connect with your community, let people in and let them support you.

# Considerations for Types of Loss

- Children and youth
- Veterans and military families
- Disaster-related deaths
- Sudden unexpected death
- Substance use deaths
- Perinatal loss



# Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation(ASPE) 2023 Report to Congress on Bereavement and Grief Services in the United States

- Disproportionate experiences of bereavement among populations such as people who use opioids (PWUO)
- Drug overdose in social networks
- Grief and bereavement may also create conditions in which substance use is exacerbated
- Circumstances around the death of a loved one -- for example an unexpected loss, a child's loss of a parent or parents, or a homicide -- can intensify the nature of the distress and may influence outcomes for those bereaved

## 2024 Death Rates

- Drug Overdoses= 80,391
- Homicides = 22,830
- Suicides = 49,316



# Grief, Suicide, and the Need for Bereavement Support

- In **2024**, one person died by suicide every **11 minutes** in the U.S.
- **14.3 million** adults seriously considered suicide
- **4.6 million** made a suicide plan
- **2.2 million** attempted suicide
- Suicide death rates increased **36%** from 2000–2022
- Rising suicide rates mean **more people are grieving** sudden, traumatic loss

- ❑ **66.4%** of bereaved adults recover (restore to a place of wellness) by 12 months
- ❑ **25%** of those with initially elevated grief recover within 6–12 months
- ❑ Positive coping—like **remembering loved ones fondly** and **expressing emotion**—supports healthy grief outcomes

Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2023). *Report to Congress on Bereavement and Grief Services in the United States*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1ed9790d93a64e9054e0b25b808f0eff/bereavement-grief-services-report-congress-2023.pdf>

# Bereavement and Grief Demand in United States

- The **COVID-19** pandemic has likely **exacerbated** the need for **bereavement and grief services**,
- As of July 2023, there have been over 1.1 million deaths from COVID-19 and for every COVID-19 death there are an average of 9 individuals who are bereaved.
- Over 700,000 United States children were newly bereaved due to a parent's death in 2020 and 2021 (Burns et al)

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a spotlight on the need for bereavement and grief support services in the United States.

# Grief and Loneliness

- 16 percent decrease in social network size from June 2019 to June 2020.
- 50 percent increase in the percentage of Americans having three or fewer friends since 1990.
- Loneliness can be a symptom of grief- the harms associated with loneliness and isolation are often underappreciated. PGD includes intense and pervasive symptoms including loneliness
- Deaths related to overdose, suicide, and community violence are also contributing to the need for grief services.

Loneliness and isolation are distinct from bereavement and grief, they can coexist for a portion of the population. Loneliness can be heightened by loss, raising concerns that many people have limited social support networks necessary to assist them through typical grieving.

# Grief Support Satisfaction Statistics

## (ASPE 2023 Report to Congress)

Spiritual leaders had highest dissatisfaction rate (41%).

Only 40–52% satisfied with support from friends/family/coworkers (ASPE, 2023).

67% prefer online grief groups; 58% satisfied with in-person groups.

**Grief Informed Peer Support is Mutually Helpful:** Peer support is helpful to bereaved survivors, reducing grief symptoms and increasing well-being and personal growth. Studies also show benefits to providers of peer support, including increased personal growth and positive meaning in life.

Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2023). *Report to Congress on Bereavement and Grief Services in the United States*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1ed9790d93a64e9054e0b25b808f0eff/bereavement-grief-services-report-congress-2023.pdf>



# The Burden of Loss: Unexpected Death of a Loved One and Psychiatric Disorders Across the Life Course in a National Study

- 3,279,857 annualized deaths in America equals 26-29 million people impacted by bereavement annually.
- The unexpected death of a loved one is among the most common traumatic events in Americans experiences with many rating it as the event in their life.

- ☐ **Bereaved Children:** Academic failures, depressive symptoms, Violent crime, substance use, youth delinquency, suicide attempts, death by suicide, premature death
- ☐ **Bereaved Siblings:** Fewer years of school, dropping out, teen pregnancy, no college, reduced income for life, premature death
- ☐ **Bereaved Parents:** Cardiac arrests, immune dysfunction, domestic violence, unwanted pregnancy, smoking, less purpose in life, marital disruption, dementia, premature death
- ☐ **Bereaved Spouses:** Depression, post traumatic stress, identity loss, premature death

The unexpected or untimely death of a loved one is among the most common traumatic events Americans experience; many rate it as the worst event in their life.

# Grief Informed Peer Support: A Critical and Growing Need

## Why It Matters

- Rising national grief burden calls for expanded access to ***non-clinical*** bereavement support.
- Many experiencing **usual (non-pathological) grief** don't qualify for clinical services but still need support.
- Peer-led and faith-based approaches are **accessible, relational, and culturally responsive**.

### Peer Support - Evidence of Impact

- Reduces isolation and stigma, fosters post-traumatic growth.
- Facilitates spiritual and emotional healing.
- Provides cost-effective, scalable support for underserved communities.
- Peer supporters gain healing and insight through helping.

*Source: ASPE Report to Congress on Bereavement & Grief Services (2023), Worden (2010), MHTTC, and program websites*

# Peer-Led Grief Support: A Critical and Growing Need

## National Models in Action

- **RIVER Model** – Community-integrated peer grief groups.
- **GPS for Bereavement** – Trauma-informed groups for diverse losses.
- **The Compassionate Friends** – Peer support for bereaved families.
- **My Grief Angels** – Online peer tools and forums.
- **TAPS** – Military peer grief support, high participant satisfaction.

## Call to Action

- Train peers in grief-informed, trauma-sensitive practices.
- Expand investment in peer grief models to strengthen community resilience.

*Source: ASPE Report to Congress on Bereavement & Grief Services (2023), Worden (2010), MHTTC, and program websites*

# SAMHSA PEP 2024

## Publication on Peer Support Specialists (PSS's)

- PSS's nationally have grown from approximately 30,000 to 82,000
- Nearly all states have standards, including training and certification programs in place to prepare and credential PSS's.
- Additionally, PSS's provide support to people experiencing similar experiences particularly related to behavioral health challenges which likely will include some form of grief and bereavement.

**PSS's perform a wide range of services to support persons in similar situations such as:**

- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ System navigation
- ☐ Linkage to resources
- ☐ Sharing of resources
- ☐ Social support
- ☐ Group facilitation
- ☐ Skill building
- ☐ Mentoring
- ☐ And goal setting toward sustained recovery processes

<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/peer-support-mh-addictions-workforce-pep24-08-005.pdf>



# SAMHSA PEP 2024

## Publication on Peer Support Specialists (PSS's) cont..

- With 82,000 and growing PSS's rapidly expanding in the workforce across the United States the landscape of where peers are employed is rapidly expanding as well.
- 43%, of all mental health facilities and approximately offer peer services
- 2/3rds of all substance use treatment facilities offer peer services.

### Settings where PSS's provide services include but are not limited to:

- ☐ Peer run organizations
- ☐ Recovery community organizations
- ☐ Outpatient treatment
- ☐ Emergency rooms
- ☐ Hospitals
- ☐ Schools/Universities
- ☐ Jails/Prisons
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Maternal health
- ☐ Faith communities and more

<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/peer-support-mh-addictions-workforce-pep24-08-005.pdf>

# Training and Practice Considerations for Peers



- Train certified peers to recognize when someone may be at risk for Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) and when to refer.
- Emphasize lived experience, cultural responsiveness, and trauma and grief-informed care principles.

## **Most clinical programs lack grief education (ASPE, 2023).**

- Peer training also lacks grief literacy focus.
- Urgent need for standardized grief-informed peer training.

*Source: ASPE Report to Congress on Bereavement & Grief Services (2023), Worden (2010), MHTTC, and program websites*

# Peer Training & Curriculum Crosswalk

(Grounded in peer/recovery)

Crosswalk Considerations

## Training a Grief Informed Peer Workforce

**G.R.I.E.F. FRAMEWORK**

**G** – Grief education and literacy expansion  
**R** – Restoration of capacity for wellness  
**I** – Interconnectedness of support networks and reducing isolation  
**E** – Empathy as a tool to validate individual grief experiences as a listening presence  
**F** – Facilitation of non-judgemental openness and acceptance of grief

**PRINCIPLES OF PEER COMPETENCIES**

1. Recovery Oriented
2. Person Centered
3. Voluntary
4. Relationship Focused
5. Trauma Informed

**DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS**

1. Emotional
2. Physical
3. Occupational
4. Intellectual
5. Financial
6. Social
7. Environmental
8. Spirituality.

**N.A.P.S PRACTICUUM CORE VALUES**

Value 1 - Peer Support is Voluntary  
Value 2 - Peer Supporters are Hopeful  
Value 3 - Peer Supporters are Open Minded  
Value 4 - Peer Supporters are Empathetic  
Value 5 - Peer Supporters are Respectful  
Value 6 - Peer Supporters Facilitate Change  
Value 7 - Peer Supporters are Honest and Direct  
Value 8 - Peer Support is Mutual and Reciprocal  
Value 9 - Peer Support is Equally Shared Power  
Value 10 - Peer Support is Strengths Focused  
Value 11 - Peer Support is Transparent  
Value 12 - Peer Support is Person Driven

(Source: SAMHSA, 2015; SAMHSA, 2012; N.A.P.S., 2023)

- N.A.P.S. Core Values: Mutuality, Authenticity, Cultural Humility
- SAMHSA Recovery Principles: Hope, Person-Driven, Holistic, Strengths-Based
- 8 Dimensions of Wellness: Emotional, Spiritual, Physical, Social, etc.
- Core Competencies: Ethics, Trauma-Informed Practice, Recovery Planning

# Introducing G.R.I.E.F. Informed Services Framework

**G.R.I.E.F. Informed Services Framework** - a grief-informed approach that equips everyday supporters to walk alongside individuals experiencing loss. Grounded in trauma-informed care, peer support values, and family systems.

**G.R.I.E.F.** is a framework that outlines five core principles to foster grief-informed and resilient individuals, systems and communities.



**G** – Grief education and literacy expansion

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# G.R.I.E.F. Informed Services Framework

## The GRIEF-informed services framework offers:

- **Clarity** – A shared language and posture for grief support across roles
- **Consistency** – A knowledge and values-based approach adaptable to many grief experiences
- **Complimentary** – Works alongside tools like the BGQ, family rituals, or peer circles
- **Cultural responsiveness** – Flexible enough to respect spiritual, racial, and relational differences in grieving



# G.R.I.E.F. Informed Services Framework

**G.** – Grief education is more than understanding loss, it's building a culture of literacy, empowerment, and awareness.

**R.** – Restoration of a capacity for wellness recognizes that grief can disrupt every domain of a person's life and restoration requires more than just emotional healing.

**I.** – Interconnectedness. Grief can isolate and cut someone off from community, routine, faith, and a sense of belonging.

**E.** – Empathy. Grief can't be fixed but it can be witnessed. Centering one's presence on empathy validates the grief as real, personal, and worthy of space to be heard.

**F.** – Facilitation of non-judgmental response. Grief is often silenced, rushed, or misunderstood in society.

# G.R.I.E.F. Informed Services Framework: Implementation

- Mental health and health settings
- Peers, Family
- Workplaces

# Thank You!

## Questions?



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- Peer Support Community Partners – RIVER. <https://www.peersupportcommunity.org/>