



**Caring for the Aged:
The Grief We Carry
Within Us**

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**WORKING WITH
OLDER ADULTS...**

**WE DON'T OFTEN THINK
ABOUT IT...BUT THIS
WORK REQUIRES
PROFESSIONAL
CAREGIVERS TO LEARN
HOW TO NAVIGATE
PROFOUND AND
MULTIFACETED GRIEF**

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**Common Losses
that Older Adults
May Encounter**

Personal Losses:

- ▶ Declining cognitive function/memory
- ▶ Decline in mobility
- ▶ Loss of ability to drive
- ▶ Needing assistance with personal care
- ▶ Inability to live alone safely – needing to move into facility-based care

Other Losses:

- ▶ Death of friends/family
- ▶ Isolation (not able to go to church, socialize with friends)



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**Think of a Patient You
Cared For, Who Truly
Touched Your Heart...**

SAY THEIR NAME OUT LOUD
THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY LOOKED
LIKE/WHERE THEY LIVED
WHAT MADE THEM SPECIAL AND WHAT
PART OF THEIR JOURNEY TOUCHED
YOU?
FIVE MINUTES AND TELL YOUR
NEIGHBOR ABOUT THEM.



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**Grief vs
Mourning**

Grief is the internal response to a loss – can be physical, emotional and/or spiritual symptoms

Mourning is taking our internal grief and moving it outward – the expression of our grief; often with close friends or family



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**There are Benefits to
Supporting Grieving
Employees**

- ▶ US Businesses lose over \$75 billion a year due to grieving employees
- ▶ When an employer supports grieving employees, their job satisfaction and retention increases
- ▶ As a manager, what can you do to support your grieving teammate?




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Where Does Work Induced Grief Come From??

- ▶ Long term clients who have decline in their physical and emotional wellbeing, loss of dignity
- ▶ Clients you have to initiate safety precautions with (no driving, assistance with bathing, moving out of their home or into their child's home)
- ▶ Clients you have a relationship with who get placed in a facility or who choose hospice care
- ▶ Client's who die while on your service




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CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.....

- ▶ Staff are Stretched
- ▶ Care partners unavailable as needed
- ▶ Facility placement unavailable
- ▶ Insurance company challenges
- ▶ Stressed families
- ▶ Our own work/life balance




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Compounding Issues

- ▶ "Burnout"
- ▶ Compassion Fatigue
- ▶ Caregiver Guilt
- ▶ Emotional Strain of Witnessing the loss of a person's dignity, mobility, cognitive function and their independence




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Grief



- ▶ Three types of grief you may encounter in your work (your clients, your team-mates, or yourself)
- ▶ **Anticipatory Grief** profound sense of loss, sadness, and anxiety experienced before an impending death or major life change
- ▶ **Cumulative Grief** the experience of having multiple losses in a short period of time or subsequent losses prior to processing the grief from the first loss
- ▶ **Disenfranchised Grief** a loss that is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned.

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The Value of "Closure"

- ▶ Having closure with a patient and/or their family has benefits for them and you
- ▶ Tell them the impact they have had on you or what you've learned from them
- ▶ Thank them for the privilege of being their caregiver
- ▶ It's ok to speak from your heart (and even to cry with those especially close patients)




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Professional Caregiver Grief- What to Watch For:

- ▶ Changes in sleeping habits
- ▶ Changes in eating patterns
- ▶ Unusual Irritability/frustration
- ▶ Sadness/tearfulness
- ▶ Don't want to go to work/calling off
- ▶ Thinking about changing careers




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How to Support Clinicians Impacted by Caring for Older Adults

- ▶ Provide opportunity for discussion of their experiences with clients
- ▶ Offer opportunity for teammates to acknowledge their sadness/grief
- ▶ Establish a way to honor the grief they feel in response to their work





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Weaving of Grief and Memories



- ▶ Mount weaving frame in a staff area
- ▶ Basket with various yarns and ribbons (varied colors, thickness) nearby
- ▶ Staff can add to the weaving, honoring the person who has died
- ▶ Write client's first name on paper with heading "**created in memory of**". Hang it with the weaving
- ▶ Place completed weavings around the office...Staff know what they represent



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Bowls/Vases with Glass Memory Stones

- ▶ Place a glass bowl/vase and colorful glass stones on a placemat in a meeting room
- ▶ Read names of deceased clients and invite teammates to place a stone in the vase
- ▶ Once full, start another jar. Place the filled jar in the office. Staff will know what it symbolizes




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Supporting Your Grieving Teammate Following a Personal Loss



- ▶ Make initial contact as soon as you hear of a significant family member death
- ▶ Attend services if possible
- ▶ Make contact prior to return to (work to explore plans for return to work)and within first week of return
- ▶ Note birth date and death date on your calendar
 - ▶ Send card to acknowledge birthdate and death anniversary to employee's home



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Kindness ALWAYS Wins!




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