



“Collectively Grieving the World as We Knew It”

Patrick Arbore, Ed.D., Founder and
Director, Center for Elderly Suicide
Prevention, Institute on Aging, 3575 Geary
Blvd., San Francisco, CA

CENTER FOR ELDERLY SUICIDE PREVENTION
(CESP) Institute on Aging, San Francisco, CA

CESP's Primary Service is the Accredited 24-hour
Friendship Line for the Elderly –800 971-0016

-- an accredited hotline/warm-line for people
60+ (or younger disabled people) who are
depressed, isolated, lonely, bereaved,
substance abusers and/or suicidal



Call Out Service Available

Friendship Line California – 888-670-1360

CESP

- Traumatic Loss Grief Services – Individual grief counseling; Saturday morning drop-in grief groups; 8-week grief groups. Contact Patrick
- Mia Grigg, Friendship Line Director,
mgrigg@ioaging.org
- Contact: Patrick Arbore (415) 750-4133,
Founder & Director, CESP
parbore@ioaging.org

Grief, Loss, and Trauma

- The covid-19 pandemic is an epidemiological crisis and a psychological crisis
- This situation triggers anxiety, stress, sadness
- It is also a time of collective sorrow
- Weir (2020) states “it’s important that we start recognizing that we’re in the middle of this collective grief. We are all losing something now

Trauma

Walsh (2007) writes that with traumatic experiences the body, mind, spirit, and relationships with others can be wounded

- Trauma can involve multiple losses including:
 - way of life and economic livelihood
 - hopes and dreams for what might have been – lack of control; unpredictability
 - shattered assumptions about the world

Ambiguous Loss

- This type of loss lacks the clarity or the finality of the death of a loved one
- Lacking clarity makes it very hard to move forward
- We can't predict all the types of losses that may be coming as this pandemic continues
- Weir (2020) “We’re talking about grieving a living loss – one that keeps going and going”

Quarantine

- This can be defined as the separation and restriction of movement of people who have possibly been exposed to the virus
- Separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty, boredom can provoke intense feelings – suicidal thoughts, anger, anxiety, depression, insomnia, stress and emotional exhaustion to name a few

Depression & Suicide

- Depression, substance abuse, and social isolation are the three of the most important risk factors for older adult suicide
- Older adults have a high risk of suicide – Men 85+ are 15 times more likely to die by suicide than women of the same age

What We Can Do

- Keep checking in on people
- Keep the support going even after the quarantine ends
- Be aware of cultural and spiritual values and practices can provide meaning and purpose for some people
- Prayer, meditative practices, and faith communities can provide support

What We Can Do

- Suffering can be mitigated in creative ways
- Music can release emotional pain and uplift the spirit
- Helping people find ways to increase resilience can be facilitated through art, writing, dance, movement, singing, literature, films
- Facilitate an environment of trust, empathy and acceptance of a range of emotions

What We Can Do

- Encourage social media such as Facebook, texting
- Remember, however, the importance of a human voice or a familiar face through phone, Facetime, or zoom
- Be mindful that not everyone is technologically savvy and may become more anxious when confronted with systems for which they are unfamiliar

What We Can Do

- We need to be able to initiate difficult conversations – this may include conversations around CPR, DNRs, End-of-Life issues, grief and loss, loneliness
- Encourage anxious people to minimize watching, reading, or listening to news about covid-19
- Help people create a range of coping strategies

Communication Strategies

1. Remember that grief and loss is a uniquely personal experience
2. Listen compassionately to the individual's stories about their suffering
3. Reassure individual's that you will not abandon them
4. Be aware of the resources in your communities that can support lonely people

References

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- Murthy, V. (2020). *Together: The healing power of human connection in a sometimes lonely world*. New York: Harper Collins
- Walsh, F. (2007). Traumatic loss and major disasters: Strengthening family and community resilience. *Family process, 46(2), 207-214*.
- Weir, K. *American Psychological Association News*, April 1, 2020