

## Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

***“Don’t let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it, and you must have it.”***

*Doug Manning,  
Don't Take My Grief Away*

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

### **Disenfranchised Grief [Doka, 1989]**

The relationship is *not* recognized.

The loss is *not* recognized.

The grief is *not* recognized/supported.

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**Martin's Expansion (1989)**

Societal refusal to sanction the relationship as important.

Widespread indifference to the griever's feelings.

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*"We pay psychotherapists to cure it, take Prozac to mute it, seek counseling from religions which exhort us to rise above it, read inspiration books to overcome it, join recovery groups and self-help groups to cope with it,*

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*spend millions to escape it, use alcohol, drugs, food, work, possessions, sex, entertainment and all the techno-toys we can get to distract ourselves from it."*

Margaret Greenspan  
*Healing Through the Dark Emotion*

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- Assumed hierarchy of grief

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*“EVERYTHING, at least every important thing that happens to us, is a snippet in our continued story, the life story we are writing with our choices. Every episode in our story becomes the raw material for the next episode.*

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*“And what we write next depends on how **we interpret the previous chapter.**”*

*Lewis Smedes, Choices*

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**Grief Shapers**

- The relationship(s) with the deceased.

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- Relationship with co-grievors

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- Manner of the loss
  - Murder
  - Suicide
  - Act of terrorism
  - Expected or unexpected
  - Stigmatized death

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

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- Griever's previous loss experience(s).

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- Perceived timeliness/untimeliness of the death

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

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- Spiritual history/resources

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- Support structures enfranchising loss

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- Co-losses or mutual losses

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Narrative Structure 1: [R. Neimeyer]

- Loss can validate/invalidate assumptions and values.

Robert Neimeyer, *Lessons of Loss*  
Jeffrey Kauffman, *Loss of Assumptive World*

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Narrative Structure 2:

- Grief is individual
- Grief is intimate
- Grief is inescapable

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Narrative Structure 3

- Grieving is something an individual does.

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Narrative Structure 4:

- Grieving is an act of affirming or reconstructing a personal world of meaning that has been challenged OR repeatedly challenged by loss.

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Narrative Structure 5:

- Grievers construct/reconstruct identities as survivors in negotiation with others

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Narrative Structure 6:

- Grievers adapt by restoring coherence to the narrative of their lives.

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**AUDIT the Griever's Needs**

[Parker-Oliver, 2002]

- How does the griever see the loss:  
Burden? Imposition? Opportunity?

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- What is causing the griever to be  
anxious? Frightened?

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- What are the key numbing operatives?

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■ How are key professionals supporting the griever?

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■ Who is offering the griever hope?

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■ What is the status of the griever's key relationships?

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- Is there unfinished business in any relationship?

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- What are the spiritual resources of the griever?
- Does his/her spiritual belief system offer a future? Or meanings in these losses?

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- What are the goals of this griever?

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- **Enfranchising grief**

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**“Gateway” Questions to Solutions**  
[Pichot & Dolan, 2003]

- If you could have one quality that you currently do not have what would it be?
- What has been the most important accomplishment in your life?

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- What is the one thing that you are most proud of that no one knows about?
- What is one thing you have done between now and the last time you were here that has helped you in your grief?
- What has been better in the last week?

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- Creative Responses

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- Give permission to grieve and to remember!

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- Create an altar or memory focus

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- Consider networking on line with other disenfranchised grievers.

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- Create a photo collage of your relationship.

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Understanding and Supporting Under-Recognized Grief

- Volunteer to support the deceased's favorite charity.

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- Memoir

*“Memoir is a way  
to figure out who you used to be  
and how you got to be who you are.”*

Abigail Thomas,  
*Thinking about Memoir, 2*

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Write a 3-5 page biography of your loved one.

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“Death/grief came knocking at my door one day...”

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*All that we ought to have thought  
**and have not thought,**  
All that we ought to have said,  
**and have not said,**  
All that we ought to have done,  
**and have not done;**  
All that we ought not to have thought,  
**and yet have thought.***

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*All that we ought not to have spoken,  
**and yet have spoken.**  
All that we ought not to have done,  
**and yet have done;**  
**For thoughts, words and works,  
pray we, O God, for forgiveness.**  
--A Persian prayer*

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***“IF WE are still breathing  
it is too early to tell  
the ultimate impact  
of any event in our lives.”***  
• John Claypool  
***God the Ingenuous Alchemist***

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*“Some people emerge from their grieving process with unexpected gains. By weathering emotional tribulations they had thought unendurable, they have a deeper, surer sense of their strength. By facing despair, and not succumbing, they know their inner capacities in a more complete way.*

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*“These gains do not in any way diminish the facts of the loss. But, yes, are benefits. Dearly purchased, hard-earned benefits.”*  
□ Steve Schwartzberg

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