

# EUNAD-IP

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## Grief

# What do we know about grief?

- „Grief“ is largely determined by cultural norms
- Cultural and societal norms determine the expression of grief
- A personal loss does not necessarily mean to feel sad
- There are no „normal“ grief reactions
- Grief is normally shared with others
- The bereavement lasts longer than is assumed in our society
- Intensive emotions but also feeling nothing (feeling numb or cold toward others), being overwhelmed by thoughts or having no thoughts about the deceased at all, being overly active or in the contrary, trying to calm down by the use of alcohol or drugs or sexual arousal may be pronounced in bereavement.

# Stage or phase models of grief

- Stage models assume a determined course of grief like: disbelief, intensive emotions, acceptance
- In working models of grief, the tasks that have to be accomplished are also conceptualized in phases like: realization, working through emotions and reuptake of emotional life
- Phase or stage models do not have an empirical basis
  - Research example Maciejewski et al analysed a group of 233 grieving persons and found that disbelief was not the dominant response in the beginning, acceptance was most dominant in all phases and yearning was the most prominent negative grief indicator in the first months.
  - Over time, disbelief and yearning decreased and acceptance increased

# Attachment models of grief

- In attachment theory, grief is the biologically determined reaction that follows the breaking of an attachment bond, grief reactions can be found in humans as well as in social animals
- Grief is the „price“ we pay for being able to form attachment bonds

# Coping models of grief

- Today most researchers prefer coping models of grief to phase or stage models
- Grieving persons have to cope with new and overwhelming emotions as well as with new life circumstances (Znoj, 2007)
- Research example, Berne study on parental grief: If this process is completed in a positive way, persons may be more able to cope with extreme negative emotions than others (Znoj, 2006)

# Wordens model of grief tasks

- Accept reality-reduce range of disbelief
- Process pain of grief
- Adjust to new reality (external, internal, spiritual-assumptive world)
- Enduring connection with deceased while moving forward

# Complicated versus normal grief

Complicated grief can be seen as maladaptive form of emotion regulation-it shows a high comorbidity with anxiety and affective disorders

- Depression: Horowitz (1997) up to 80%
- Anxiety: Kim & Jacobs (1991) for generalized anxiety 82%, for panic disorder: 36%
- PTSD: estimates reach from 20% to 50% (Jacobs, 1999)
- Substance abuse: heightened but no empirical findings
- Suicide: Risk heightened
- Somatic disorders: often reported

# Coping with grief?

- **Rituals**  
(for farewell, connecting, yeardays, birthdays etc individual and collective rituals)
- **Balance between negative and positive emotions**  
(allowance to experience also positive emotions)
- **Remembrance**  
(fotos, objects, places, talking about the deceased...)



# Grief counseling what is needed?

- Talking: to be able to talk to somebody who is not emotionally involved (esp when talking about difficult emotions, being able to tell the whole story)
- Information and psychoeducation (what to do next, trauma and grief reactions, support systems)
- Emotional presence and interest of a helper
- Activation of social resources
- Esp after traumatic situations: guarantee continuity in support/therapeutic support

# What to do when supporting grieving persons

- Provide warmth and understanding and encourage using rituals in mourning process
- Encourage the individual grieving process and do not force your understanding of grief upon the person
- Encourage and support collective grieving and mutual tolerance of different reactions and needs
- Try to decrease extreme positions of chief mourner and supporter in grieving family/group
- Encourage distance and recovery as well as positive emotions despite grief