

The Basics of Grief and Multiple Loss: a Training Manual for Workers in AIDS Service Organizations



Grief and loss are occupational realities for AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs/CBAOs).

Since 1994, the AIDS Bereavement Project of Ontario (CANADA) has been assisting community-based ASOs in their responses to HIV/AIDS-related multiple loss through support, training, research and collaboration.

The Training Manual is based on ABPO program components developed over the past decade, from 350 workshops for 214 agencies with 3,496 participants.

This step-by-step Manual contains:

- a facilitator training guide
- defined workshop agendas
- relevant assessment tools
- presentation and educational materials

It provides a comprehensive synthesis of grief, multiple loss and transition theory in the context of AIDS. These accessible materials provide a solid orientation for ASO staff, boards and volunteers.

WORKSHOP FOUNDATIONS

Loss Work as Teambuilding: Why do grief training with agency personnel?

- ▶ Because working in AIDS is working in loss, an AIDS agency is a grief agency. In order for the organization to be healthy, it must deal with grief at the organizational level.
- ▶ Organizations will have staff with varying experiences of loss, and these experiences will impact the workplace. All staff will be in a roller-coaster state of anticipated loss with regard to the HIV+ people they know and to whom they are attached.
- ▶ Participant's personal and collective learning has ripple effects through to their clients and the larger community.

Responses of Workers Dealing with Loss

Research of Canadian AIDS Workers (2000-2002) identified that Workers Experience:

- Sadness, Depression, Numbness, Anger
- Psychic Numbing; social isolation
- Living with the 'Death Imprint'
- Survivor Guilt
- Struggle for Meaning

Organizational Symptoms:

- Staff Turnover and Burnout
- Impaired Care and Communication amongst Staff

Conventional training leaves workers painfully unprepared to deal with grief saturation.

Training Objectives

- To normalize grieving as an integral part of AIDS work.
- To normalize and acknowledge the discomfort of, and desire to avoid doing grief work.
- To facilitate some 'unpacking' of aspects of accumulated grief (stories, feelings, anticipated losses) and thereby 'lighten the load'.
- To support existing coping strategies and offer the opportunity for developing new skills.
- To give workers the opportunity to practice 'saying good-bye' using a model for closure that they can incorporate into their lives.

Workshop Components

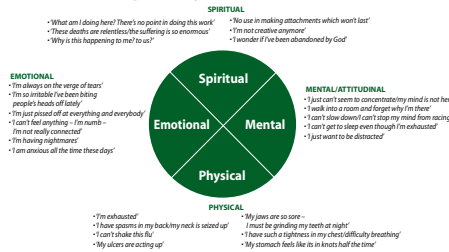
WORKSHOP OUTLINE

- 1 Welcome and Introduction
- 2 Definitions Related to Grief and Loss
- 3 Loss History Exercise:
 - ▶ The impact of AIDS-related loss on workers
 - ▶ Understanding your loss history
- 4 Signs and Symptoms of Grief
- 5 The Grief Journey
- 6 Grief Work: Tasks of Mourning and Common Avoidance Patterns
- 7 AIDS-related Multiple Loss:
 - ▶ Issues in multiple loss
 - ▶ Grief overload
 - ▶ Multiple loss and learned helplessness
 - ▶ Core loss
- 8 Coping Strategies:
 - ▶ Coping strategies chart
 - ▶ Holistic health framework

Enhancing Coping Strategies Using the Stages of Change:

 - ▶ Building capacity worksheet
- 9 Closure Theory:
 - ▶ Aspects of closure

Signs & Symptoms of Grief



Three Essential Questions:

WHO AM I?

(as my assumptions about the world and myself are thrown into question by the experience)

WHO HAVE I BEEN?

(as I search for anchors in my own past experience, and prior losses come into my awareness)

WHO AM I BECOMING?

(as I integrate the changes that this experience brings to my life)

AIDS-related Multiple Loss Definition:

- Deaths of important people
- Loss of social support
- Loss of future plans
- Loss of personal history
- Loss of personality characteristics
- Loss of a world that is not constantly overshadowed by death and dying

Coping Strategies

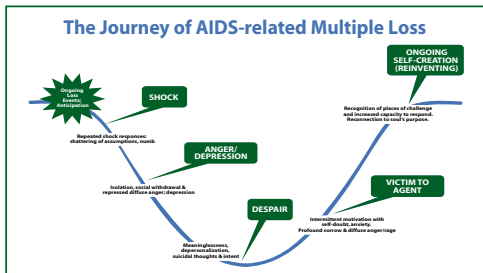
"I can't stand it...and I can't stop it... but I can deal with it."

Multiple Loss bereaved need to build social supports and relate with at least one other person who has the lived experience of coping with multiple loss.

And can use the following coping strategies:

- Ongoing and consistent self care
- Boundary setting
- Identify forms of emotional and physical distancing
- Social activism and volunteerism
- Personal and community rituals

'Heal the community by healing the individuals and in this way, resurrect the sense of community fundamental to the mental health of the individual.'
Herman Kaal



AIDS Bereavement Project of Ontario

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