

# “You're Never Alone”

A Seminar for the MCSD Dealing With  
Educator Grief in the Time of Covid-19

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# DEALING WITH GRIEF

## Outline

- Grief work defined
- Stages of grief
- Normal grief
- Unresolved grief
- Characteristics of grief
- Facilitating resilience
- Self care
- Conclusion

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## The Challenges of COVID-19 on the Brain

- Wired for the saber tooth tiger jumping from behind the rock - fight, flight, fright
- Neuroscience tells us we are wired for human connection - it is our resiliency
- Safety is equated to repetition and familiarity
- Educators are use to being in charge and making things happen
- With time, regression to compassion fatigue

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## Grief

- Grief is an emotional suffering caused by any significant loss.
- Grief involves a sequence of thoughts and feelings that follow the loss (mourning).
- Grief is a process – not a single act.
- Grief is the internal meaning given to an external event.
- The amount of grief is in proportion to the loss.

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## Grief Work Is Unfinished Business When:

- Resistance becomes resentment
- Resentment becomes rejection
- Rejection becomes depression
- Living without being in touch with self
- Feelings won't just go away

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## Grief Situations Related to COVID-19

- Physical challenges in ourselves or our family
- Social loss of peers, students, and administration
- Ability to help is hindered by difficulties and disparities
- Unknown future – changing direction
- Conflicting information at all levels of leadership
- Loss of routine
- Death of the vision for this school year

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## Phases (Kubler-Ross)

- Denial – “I don’t want to talk about it.”
- Anger – “I am irritated and agitated.”
- Bargaining – “Maybe this is a bad dream and will end quickly with a vaccine or just disappear.”
- Despair/Depression – “Yes, this is going to last a long time and I have no control. Life is changed forever.”
- Acceptance – “It will be alright and I will get through this.”

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## The Process (Westberg)

- Shock
- Express emotions
- Depression and loneliness
- Physical symptoms of distress
- Panic
- Unresolved guilt
- Anger and resentment
- Resistance to returning to normal activities
- Gradually hope comes through
- Struggle to affirm reality



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## Manifestations Of Normal Grief (Worden)

- Feelings (sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, etc.)
- Physical Sensations (fatigue, numbness)
- Cognitions (loneliness, helplessness, yearning)
- Behaviors (adjustment, withdrawal, dealing with the “have to do’s”)

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## Hindrances to Grief

- The importance of what is lost (ambivalent-anger)
- The nature of the attachment (dependent)
- The mode of the loss (uncertain or delayed)
- Historical antecedents (many/multiple)
- Personality variables (unfinished business)
- Social variables (forbidden/unable)

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## Symptoms of Unresolved Grief

- Serious disease of psychosomatic origins
- Appears “stuck” in a stage of grief
- Any psychotic behavior
- “Acting out” behavior – self sabotage
- Suicidal ideation or attempt
- A marked alteration in style of living
- Disruption of important relationships

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## Signs of Clinical Depression

- Does not accept support
- Irritable, but does not directly express anger
- Exhibits a pervading sense of doom
- Projects a sense of hopelessness and chronic emptiness
- Chronic physical symptoms
- Generalized feelings of guilt
- Presents a deep loss of esteem

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## Physical Characteristics

- Lack of energy
- Shortness of breath
- Stomach emptiness
- Tightness in throat and chest
- Sensitivity to noise
- Heart palpitations
- Queasiness
- Impaired immune system
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Agitation and generalized tension
- Chills, tremors, and subjective stress
- Trouble swallowing
- No taste
- Exhaustion

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## Emotional Characteristics

- Events seem unreal, detached, incomplete
- Fear loss of sanity, emotional roller coaster
- Everything seems disorganized
- Feelings of irritability or hostility / conflict
- Desire to talk about the loss
- A restlessness without zest for life
- Loneliness, intolerance, mistrust, isolation
- Anxiety, apathy, depression, depleted energy
- Overwhelmed, vulnerable, demoralized
- Sadness and longing

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## Behavioral Characteristics

- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite disturbance
- Absent-mindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Dreams regarding loss
- Searching, calling out
- Over activity, rigidity, over work
- Crying, emoting, conveying sadness
- Visiting or viewing objects of attachment
- Need for anonymity
- Self-medicating
- Declining work and life performance

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## Cognitive Characteristics

- Disbelief
- Confusion and disorientation
- Preoccupation with details
- Sense of presence with the lost
- Hallucinations and ideations
- Difficulty making decisions, lower concentration
- Nightmares and reduced sense of safety
- Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts



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## Spiritual Characteristics

- Questioning the meaning of life
- Running away from God (skepticism and disbelief)
- Running toward God (renewed faith)
- Loss of hope
- Reduced joy
- Magical thinking
- Visitations / apparitions
- Loss of purpose
- Loss of compassion

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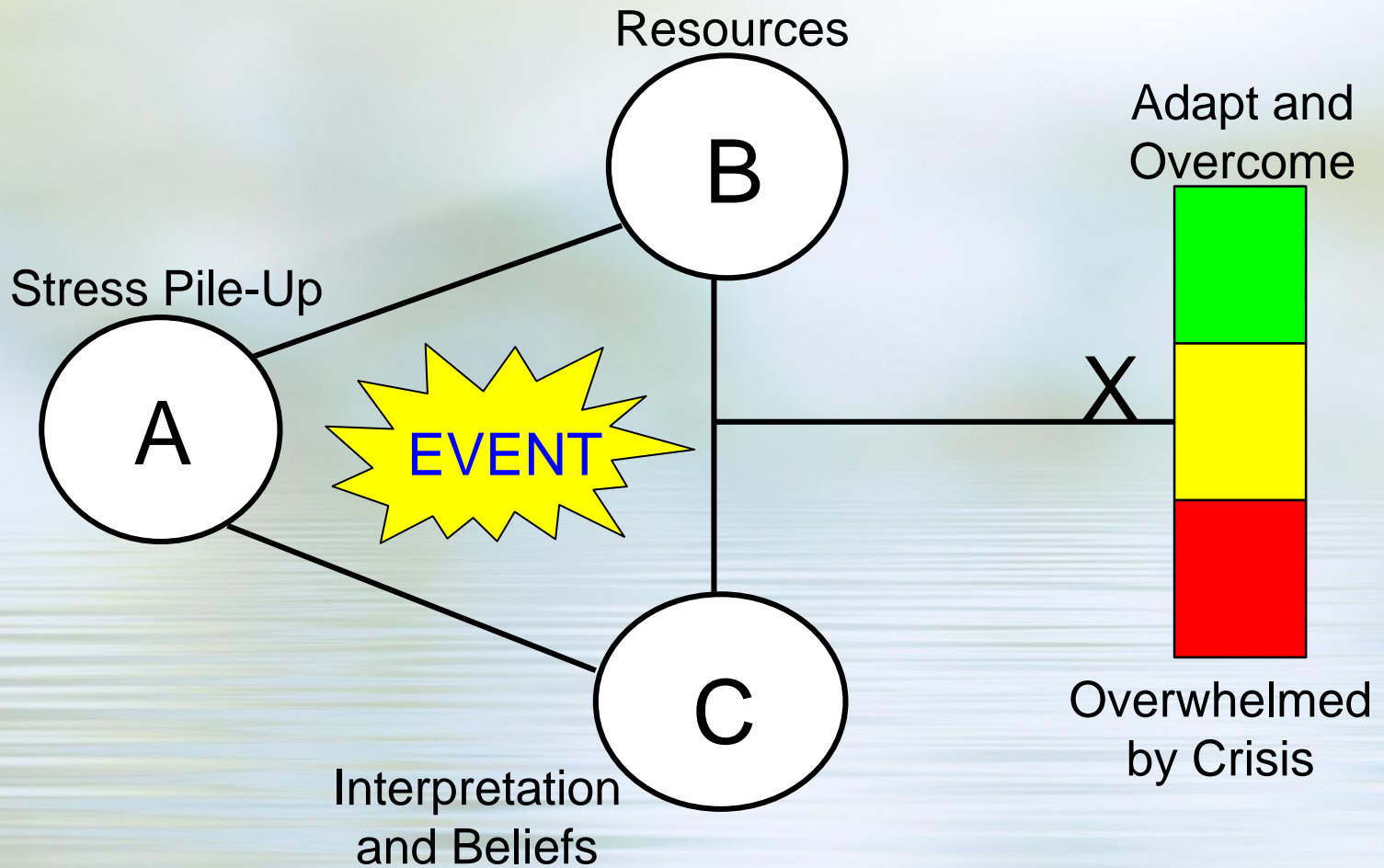
## Claiming Resiliency in the Face of Grief

- Resiliency
  - “the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress”
  - “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change”

(2006, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated)
- Two Defining Theories
  - Ruben Hill:  $ABC=X$
  - John Bowlby: Attachment

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## ABC=X Model of Response



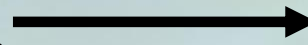
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## Attachment and Resilience

J. Bowlby: Attachment Theory

Secure  
Attachments  
“Safe Haven”

Lead to:



- Stress Coping
- Behavior Regulation
- Increased Function
- Recovery

Stronger, more  
Resilient Providers

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## Help from Attachment Theory

People Do Better:

When they are immersed in solid/rich/supportive relationships

- Families
- Community
- Units (“Band of Brothers/Sisters!”)

Place to Recover  
Safe Haven from the Storms

Someone Who’s “Got Your Back”

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## Neurobiology and Resilience

### Chronic Limbic Arousal

- Fight, flight, freeze
- Emotional cutoff
- Poor future planning
- Reduced immune resistance
- Health breaks

### Limbic Soothing

- Neo-cortical logic controls
- Connection with others
- Decision making
  - Plans for future
  - Delayed gratification
- Immune resistance

Connection to Others 

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## The Healing Journey

- Emotional
  - Claim the feelings
  - Soothe limbic system
- Behavioral
  - Increase our resources
  - Engage support of others and be active
- Cognitive
  - Challenge our beliefs
  - Learn and practice self care
- Spiritual
  - Reclaim meaning
  - Cling to faith and hope

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## Taking Care of You in COVID-19

“You cannot give what you do not have.”

- Claim your dignity and self-worth as a human being, professional educator and builder of future generations.
- Acknowledge your grief related to this school year and your right to mental wellness.
- Assert your confidence, calm, and control.
- Give yourself positive messages.
  - We will get through this.
  - I am not alone.
  - I have signature strengths.
- Live in the expectation and hope of what the other side of this looks like.



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## Practice Self Care (COSC Course, US Army)

- Self assessment and self-awareness
- Physical rest that sustains your ability to work
- Emotional and spiritual renewal
- Healthy body work in exercise and diet / nutrition
- Work hard and play hard balance
- Contact with nature and other calming stimuli
- Creative expression
- Boundaries and limit setting
- Get support from others – build your team
- Celebrate by remembering your joys and achievements

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## Characteristics Of Resilience and Hope

- Examine both positive and negative feelings without anxiety.
- Remain close to supportive caring relationships.
- Continue to attend to the duties of life.
- Get busy doing what you can.
- Show self care and know it is not a luxury.
- Give yourself the space and time you need.
- Reinvest your energies in new directions.
- Find ego replenishment through self affirmations.

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## How You Can Help Yourself (Quick List)

- Have a support system.
- Share regularly.
- Affirm yourself and your work.
- Make a recreation schedule.
- Practice transitional behaviors.
- Have fun and play more.

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## Conclusion

Grief work is life's work. It must be done alone. It must also be done in community. It must be done to move on with living.