



Uncovering Disenfranchised Grief

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Outline of Discussion

- Grief Overview
- Disenfranchised Grief
- Different Presentations
- Working through Grief with 'Self' & 'Other.'

Normal Grief

Denial

Bargaining

Depression

Anger

Acceptance



Kubler-Ross, 1969

Complicated Grief

Feelings of loss are debilitating
They don't improve after time
passes

Painful emotions are severe
and long-lasting

Many struggle to recover and
resume their life.

Anticipatory Grief



Feelings of grief are felt before the loss actually happens

People facing their own death or the death of a loved one.

Ambiguous Grief

A profound sense of loss and

sadness not associated

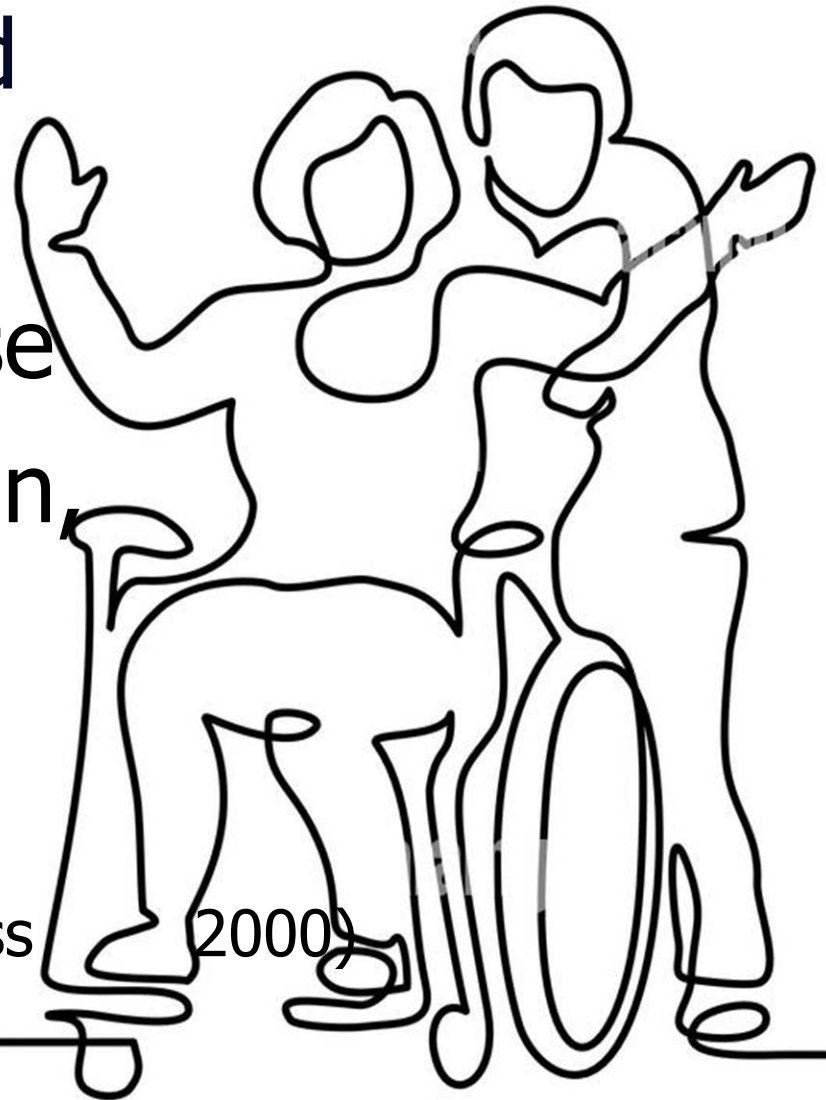
with death. The loved

one's there but because

of reasons i.e. addiction,

dementia, traumatic

brain injury, there's
loss but no closure. (Boss 2000)



Disenfranchised Grief



A loss that is not openly acknowledged, socially validated or publicly mourned

In other words a loss where society itself fails the griever by simply not recognising their right to grieve.

No matter what
type of loss you
have experienced;
your grief is valid.

Grief Touches the Whole of our Being

- Socially
- Physically
- Emotionally
- Mentally
- Spiritually



Grief

Is our initial response to a loss.

Grieving or Grief Work

Is the process to resolve grief.

- Painful
- Uses emotional energy and is tiring
- Not passive and not an event
- It's about remembering & letting be.

We want people to be happy.
We want them to be resilient.
We want them to be untroubled
by what happens in their lives.

The goal is an eternal
equilibrium:

Unruffled.

Unaffected.

To rise above any hardship.

Our treatment goals focus on
a return to positivity and a
good attitude within a few
weeks.

“If you must be affected by a
big loss in your life,
Please do it quickly & quietly!!!
It just makes it easier on
everybody”



Why does someone's evident pain make us uncomfortable enough to avoid it, shut it down or try to 'fix it' ? Megan Devine (2018)

Defences to Avoid Grieving

- Denial
- Minimisation
- Rationalisation
- Intellectualise
- Compartmentalise
- Displacement
- Repression
- Black Humour.



No matter what
type of loss you
have experienced;
your grief is valid.

DISENFRACTHISED GRIEF:

**WHEN NO ONE
UNDERSTANDS YOUR LOSS**



“This type of grief occurs anytime someone feels that society has denied their need, right, role, or capacity to grieve.”

Kenneth Doka (1989).

Disenfranchised Grief: Key Themes

1. Lack of recognition for the relationship
2. Cause of death surrounded by stigma
3. Social expectations for your grief journey
4. Those excluded from mourning
5. Losses considered less significant.

(Doka 1989).

1. Lack of Recognition for the Relationship

Different types of relationships fall into this category:

- Infidelity
- Death of an ex-spouse
- Hidden or forbidden relationships
- Children of step-parents
- Death of a casual partner.

- Relationship with an incarcerated or convicted individual
- Relationship with a mentally unwell friend or patient
- Loss of a close friend or neighbour.



2. Cause of Death Surrounded by Stigma

- Death by suicide, drug overdoses, murder, car accident caused by the deceased
- Death by some sort of criminal activity.



3. Social Expectations

‘Unofficial rules’ how one should grieve after a recent loss:

- Become excessively emotional
- Withdraw from social events
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns.

However, if Grief is Expressed Differently

The following are less validated:

- Anger
- Lack of emotion
- Increased busyness
- Misuse of substances or alcohol
- Incongruent emotion.

Others' reactions invalidating your grief might include:

- "Shouldn't you be over it by now?"
- "You have to stay strong and keep moving forward"
- "If you don't cry, that means the loss doesn't affect you"
- "It takes half as long as a relationship's timespan to get over it."



Stephanie Lee

4. Those Excluded From Mourning

Some assume certain people lack the capacity to mourn: e.g.

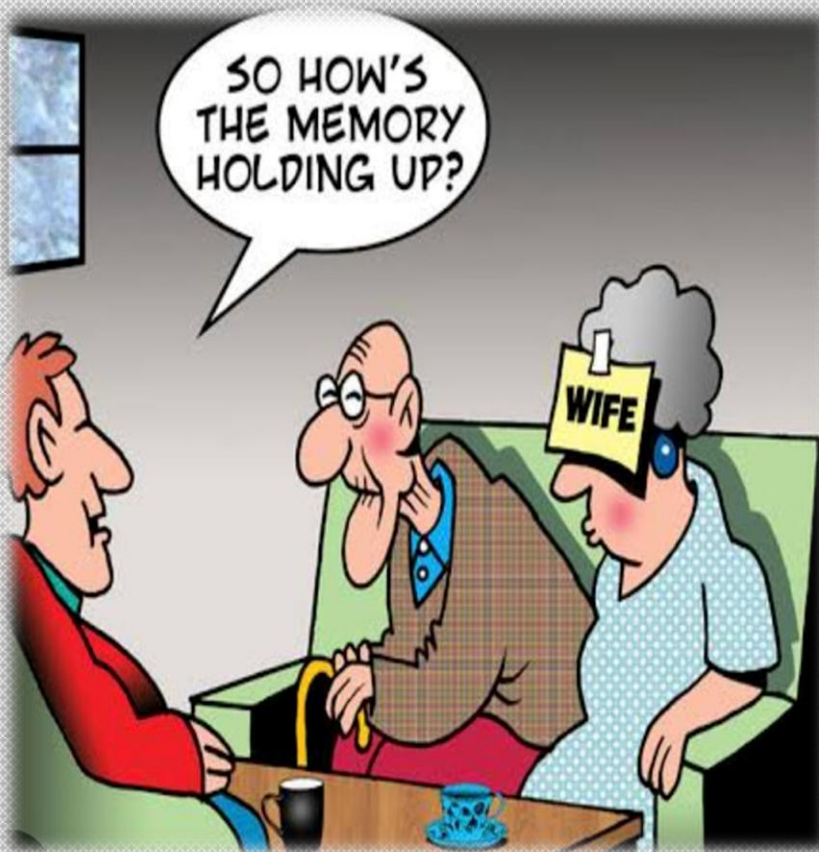
- Children and at time teenagers
- People with cognitive impairment or developmental disabilities
- People with severe mental health conditions.



We often discount the grief of people who didn't have a formalised relationship i.e. The death of a boyfriend or girlfriend might not elicit our respect and sympathy in the same way as the loss of an immediate



5. Losses Considered Insignificant



- Dementia, Parkinsons, Alzheimer
- Empty Nest Syndrome.

Others losses include:

- Infertility
- Abortion, miscarriage or a stillborn child
- Estrangement/loss from a loved one experiencing:
 - Addiction
 - Loss of cognitive function
 - Severe mental health issues.

Some other losses could include:

- Home and possessions
- Employment
- The natural process of aging
- A pet
- Country and culture
- Safety and independence
- Years of life to abuse or neglect
- Adoption that doesn't proceed
- End of a relationship or Divorce
- Life Changing Diagnosis i.e.
Cardiac, Cancers, MS, Motor Neuron.

**Shattered
Dreams**

Future Plans

**Financial
Stress**

Secondary Losses

Security

Pain

LOSS

Identity

Housing

Hope

Safety

Self-Esteem

Family

Sense of self

Trust

Employment

Relationships

- Grievers experiencing these significant losses may feel unsupported in their grief reactions.
- This means they're not likely to receive the support they need to process and move through their grief.



Next person who
minimizes my
grief is getting
a swift kick
to the shin.

Consequences of Disenfranchised Grief

“Disenfranchised grievers feel they cannot openly or publicly acknowledge their grief.

This negatively impacts mental health; increasing loneliness, anxiety, depression and shame.”

(Doka, 2021)

- This leads to individuals hiding their feelings
- Prolonging the emotional pain and significant loss
- And at times falling into a vicious cycle of complicated grief; impacting healing.

When others continually dismiss grief suggesting one shouldn't feel "*that* sad,"... doubt sets in. By internalising these messages, grief becomes effectively disenfranchised and leads to:

- Doubt and guilt around their perceived 'inappropriate' reaction
- Increased difficulty working through distress
- Difficulty coping with future losses.

So what elephant is
in your room?



How it Feels to have a Loss Dismissed

- Isolation
- Abandonment
- Shame
- Anger
- Guilt
- Difficulty expressing emotions.



Other Experiences Associated with Disenfranchised Grief include:

- Relationship problems
- Trouble focusing
- Emotional overwhelm
- Mood swings.

And can contribute to:

- Depression
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Shame
- Substance Abuse
- Diminished Self Esteem.



In a Nut Shell

This is Normal

Looking Ahead

A dark, moody landscape with a bright light source (sun or moon) breaking through clouds, casting a glow on a body of water. The scene is atmospheric and somber, with the light source creating a strong contrast against the dark sky and water.

Any loss is hard

If your grief is not validated it can become complicated

Learning to accept that grief is valid can help one cope and heal.

It's important to first identify the loss and grief to begin the healing process and then seek grief support.



- Allow yourself to grieve
- Learn about your grief
- Don't explain yourself to others
- Ask for what you need & help when necessary
- Create a ritual
- Seek professional help.

When your grief is not validated, grief support is available i.e.

Face to face or online support groups.

However, if grief remains complicated seek the help of specialised grief professionals.



Supporting those with Disenfranchised Grief

- Active Listening
- Validation
- Normalising
- Empathy



Comments to



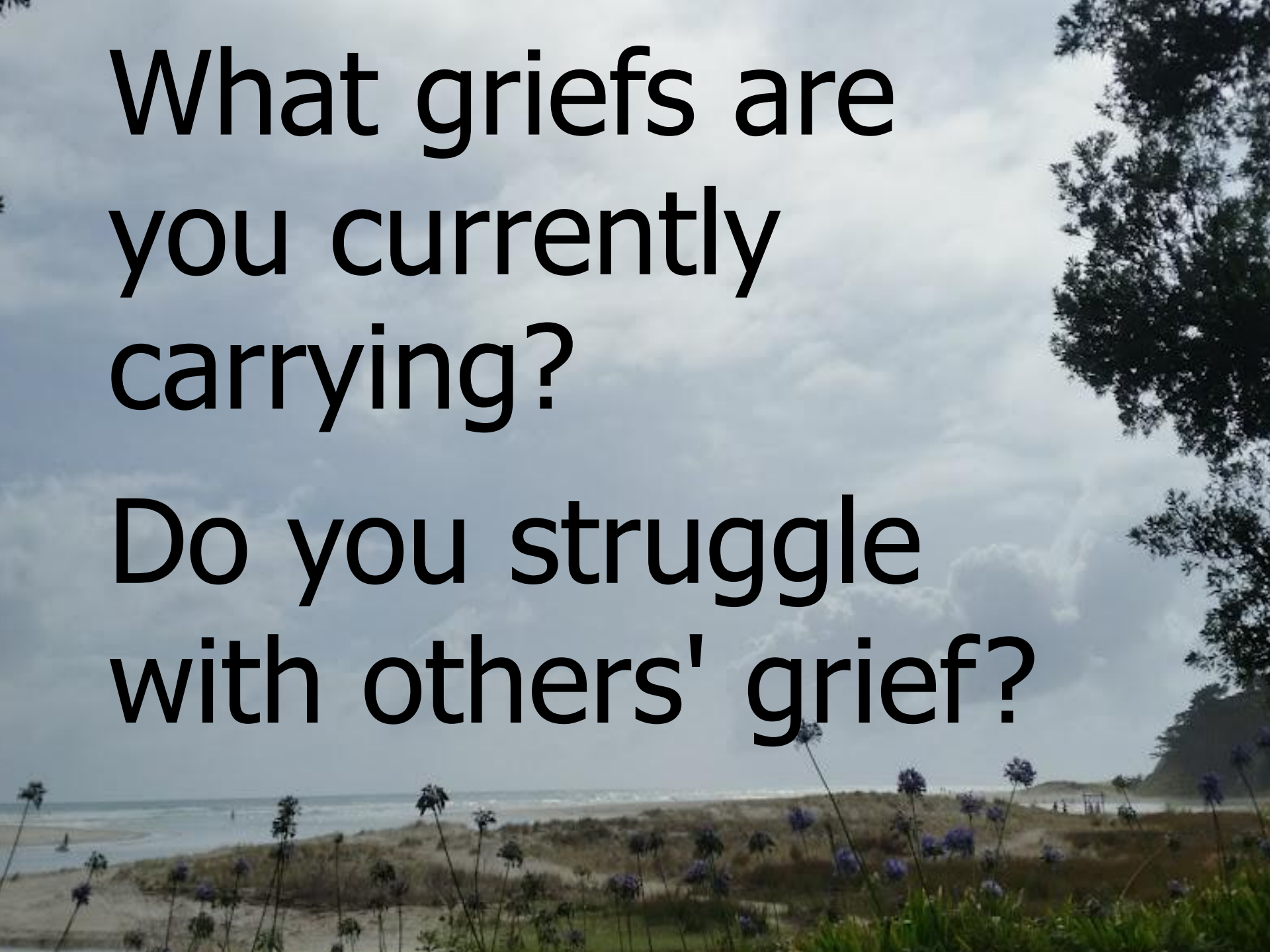
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Grieving is hard enough.
But when those you love don't
understand your grief.....
it can be even harder.

The greatest distance between
two people is misunderstanding



A coastal landscape with a cloudy sky, a beach, and dunes with purple flowers in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

What griefs are
you currently
carrying?

Do you struggle
with others' grief?