

Flexing Your Core – Domain 6: Loss, Grief & Bereavement

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Key ways to Support Grief & Loss

- Perspective taking: Remember it is **their** truth, not yours
- Personally connecting to the individual's experience, which is vulnerable, but important to empathetic care
 - Doesn't necessarily mean sharing your story but imaging it within yourself, putting yourself in their shoes
- Staying away from "fixing" and judging, this disconnects us from the person we are hoping to support
 - Going back to person's truth, putting aside our agenda
- Recognizing emotion in other people
- Other ways?
 - Often it's our own anxiety

Empathy vs. Sympathy

[Brené Brown on Empathy vs Sympathy - YouTube](#)

Stages / Experiences in grieving

While these are widely accepted stages / experiences in grief, they are not linear nor are they all experiences everyone goes through. Grief is a very individual journey:

- Denial
- Anger/guilt
- Depression / loneliness
- Bargaining
- Acceptance

Case studies

How would you support this person?

Sam and his wife were married for 55 years period she recently passed away from multiple myeloma at the age of 84. Recently Sam's friends have noticed him saying things like “she is not gone, she'll come around the corner any second”. Sam has been unable to fully understand what has happened and been struggling to cope with the loss of his wife.

- Listening and being there, inquiring about his perspective
- Thinking about wife may make him happy
- Support team for him? Assessing anxiety, depression & bereavement support
- Denial piece: can be very natural in the coping process

Geraldine is an 85-year-old woman with end stage kidney failure. She has been on a palliative care unit for just over a week now and the nurses have started to notice and changes in her behavior. While her labs are stable, she has become irritated towards the nurses and other care team members, she has had episodes of unexplained anxiety, and she refuses to participate in care and ADL's.

- Importance of having conversation with her – how does she feel about being in the unit? Getting and understanding of where she sits with that
- Seeing if she has any symptoms that need to be managed. She may be experiencing pain and that's causing anxiety.

Sophie is the sister of your patient Natasha, who was recently involved in a motor vehicle accident and is on life support. Sophie was the driver in the accident where they were hit from the side when another car ran a red light. You notice that Sophie is saying things like “If I had only left the house 5 minutes earlier the accident might not have happened”.

- Wondering how she is feeling? Listening to her and allow her to talk (similar to Brené Brown) – empathy rather than sympathy.
- She needs support, ask what supports she has?
- Likely wondering about next steps for her sister in ICU
- Bargaining – asking her about the 5mins – what does she mean by that? There's a story there. Recognize and acknowledge the pain. Very human desire to want to control. How can I help you in supporting and letting that story go?

Sometimes patients don't want it fixed, it can really be about us identifying – asking them is this something you'd like to address more now? not assuming our role is to fix right now.