

The Rutgers DSW Program

Module Title: Loss I: Theories of Grief

Instructor:

Residency: March 2019

Time:

Module Description:

Classic and postmodern grief theories help us to understand how people respond to loss, but do little to help us individualize our practice to varied developmental capacities and needs over the lifespan. In order to understand the newer theories of grief and loss, we must understand the evolution of grief theory since Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. We may need to UN-learn what we think we know about loss/ grief in order to understand the recent burgeoning of Postmodern grief theories and how they have supplanted earlier stage-based and task-based approaches to loss and grief. Postmodern grief theory, by its nature, assumes diversity in ethnic, religious, educational, age and other situated identities. Here we will review traditional stage and task-based theories while also critiquing the messages those theories sent about the healthy resolution of grief. We will explore Postmodern concepts of grief and consider what messages are conveyed by the very different approaches to grief and loss- indeed the very different definitions of what even constitutes a loss.

Module Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Trace the evolution of grief theory and explain how post-modern concepts inform grief intervention now.
2. Consider the implicit messages of varied grief theories for both griever and grief workers in terms of their interpretation of what constitutes grief work and what might be gained from it.
3. Be prepared to use the lens of loss and grief to understand experiences not typically understood within the context of loss such as substance use, professional changes, immigration, domestic violence etc.

Required Readings:

1. McCoyd, J.L.M. & Walter, C. A. (2016). *Grief and loss across the lifespan: A biopsychosocial perspective (2nd edition)*. New York: Springer Publishing. Chapter 1
2. Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Boerner, K.). (2017). Cautioning health-care professionals: Bereaved persons are misguided through the stages of grief. *Omega (United States)*, 74(4), 455-473. doi:10.1177/0030222817691870

Recommended Readings:

1. Kubler- Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying: What the dying have to teach their doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families*. New York: MacMillan.(Chapters 3-7, 12)
2. Doka, K. (2002). *Disenfranchised grief: New directions, challenges, and strategies for practice*. Champagne, IL: Research Press. Ch 1
3. Klass, D., Silverman, P. R., & Nickman, S. L. (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*. Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis. Ch 1, 2, 20

Module Reflection Questions: These are designed to help you think about the readings- you do not need to write anything, nor even be prepared to answer them, they are merely here to help you think about some of the issues in the readings.

1. How do task and stage models both help and hurt grievers as they navigate their grieving?
2. What challenges might a therapist have in utilizing the post-modern grief theories, especially in a world permeated by Kubler- Ross' "Stages of Grief"?
3. What maturational losses have you recognized in a client or yourself but not had the language or conceptual definition to recognize as such?