

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

## Supporting Grievers of Traumatic and COVID-19 Loss

Deb Holt, MS, PCC-S, Certified Thanatologist  
Program Coordinator  
Pathways of Hope  
Ohio's Hospice of Dayton

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Learning Objectives:

At the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to:

- ✓ List common manifestations of grief, including those with traumatic loss
- ✓ Describe strategies to help grievers of traumatic loss deal with the difficult emotions of grief

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Relevant Research Facts

- Can trigger mental health issues in adults with **no** history of psychiatric disorders (Keyes et al., 2014)
- Mental health disorders are more elevated after such a death than following natural deaths (Kristensen et al., 2012)
- The trajectory of recovery appears to be slower after sudden traumatic death (Kristensen et al., 2012)
- Associated with painful consequences in every area of life.

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*"A death is considered traumatic if it occurs **without warning**; if it is **untimely**; if there is **damage** to a loved one's body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with the **intent to harm**; if the survivor regards the death as **preventable**; if the survivor believes that the loved one **suffered**; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as **unfair and unjust**."*

Wortman & Latack (2017)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

In light of the COVID crisis, the definition of traumatic death has been expanded. In the past, traumatic death had been defined as primarily having been **sudden**. Now, the consideration of **traumatic circumstances** have been included in the definition.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Types of Traumatic Deaths*

- Accident or disaster
- Suicide
- Homicide (including terrorism and war)
- Acute natural death
  - Medical events
  - Acute illness

• Rando, T.A. (2021, February 2). *Twelve Care Strategies for Treating Traumatic Bereavement* (Webinar, Hospice Foundation of America).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### COVID-19 Deaths as Traumatic Loss

- Recent research study reported in Omega: Journal of Death and Dying:
  - Two major findings in grievors:
    - Very high levels of post-traumatic stress, with 94.6% of the sample to be in the diagnostic range of post-traumatic stress disorder
    - Levels of post-traumatic growth were very low (Carson et al., 2021)

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Factors in COVID deaths contributing to traumatic loss

- Death is largely sudden and unexpected
- Individuals prohibited from being with their loved ones
- Death perceived as capricious
- Anger at those who exposed loved one
- Guilt for not doing more to protect
- Shaming from others
- Traditional rituals and social support interference

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### COVID Grief in the Context of Larger Societal Losses

- Social distancing/isolation
- Health concerns/fear of infection
- Economic/job loss
- Loss of the assumptive world
- Political turmoil

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*“Grief is the rope burn left behind, when that which is held is pulled beyond our grasp”*

Stephen Levine  
 “Unattended Sorrow: Recovering From Loss and Reviving the Heart”

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

10

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

**About Grief....**

- Normal acute grief is intensely painful, exhausting and consuming
- What is “normal” varies widely among individuals
  - Every bereavement, like every death, is unique
  - Grief permanently changes the griever

11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

11

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS

•Sleep disturbances	•Breathlessness
•Nervousness/tension	•Dry mouth
•Muscle weakness	•Lack of appetite
•Physical pain	•Heart palpitations
•Exhaustion	•Weight gain/loss
•Lack of energy	•Gastrointestinal disturbances
•“Slowness”	•Overly sensitive to noise
•Restlessness	•Lack of sexual desire
•Tightness in the chest/throat	•Increased susceptibility to illness

12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

12

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS

- Loneliness
- Emptiness
- Depression
- Vulnerability/Helplessness
- Yearning/Pining
- Abandonment
- Powerlessness
- Shock/Numb
- Sadness
- Anger
- Relief
- Guilt
- Anxiety

13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

13

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

COGNITIVE EXPRESSIONS

- Auditory/visual hallucinations
- Sense of presence of the deceased
- Fearful of losing control
- Fear of "going crazy"
- Flashbacks/nightmares
- Disbelief/denial
- Confusion
- Thought preoccupation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Inability to process information
- Forgetfulness

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

14

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

BEHAVIORAL EXPRESSIONS

- Tearfulness
- Sleep disturbances
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Appetite disturbances
- Absentmindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Searching/calling out
- Restless over-activity
- Vivid dreams of the deceased
- Difficulty starting/maintaining organized activity

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

15

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS

- Concerns about the afterlife
- Exploration of spirituality
- Issues of guilt and forgiveness
- Struggles with competing value systems
- Search for meaning
- Questioning faith/belief systems
- Loss of faith/belief system
- Confirmation of faith
- Anger at God

16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*“Timeline” of Grief*

First month: Shock/numbness

Months two to four: Intense grief/recognition of permanence setting in

Months five-ten: Adjustment/more good days than bad

Months ten-thirteen: Resurgence of intense pain as anniversary approaches and passes

17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Issues Complicating Mourning Following Sudden, Traumatic Death*

- The capacity to cope is diminished
- The assumptive world is violently shattered
- The loss does not make sense
- There is no time to say good-bye/finish unfinished business

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Issues Complicating Mourning Following Sudden, Traumatic Death*

- The mourner may obsessively reconstruct events in retrospect
- The death may provoke a post-traumatic response.
- Grievors tend to have relatively more intense emotional reactions

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Additional Factors Often Involved in Traumatic Loss*

- Witnessing the death
- Multiple deaths
- Having to make life-support or organ donation decisions
- Media attention
- Being blamed for the death
- Prolonged court proceedings
- People asking intrusive questions about the death

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Remember: Just as every individual and loss is unique, each person's grief process is also unique.*

21

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Common Struggles (Grievers of Traumatic Loss)*

- **Shattering of assumptive world and a sense of safety**
  - Assumptive world is “a person’s mental set, derived from past personal experience, that contains all a person assumes, expects and believes to be true about the self, the world, and everything and everyone in it”
    - Encyclopedia of Death and Dying

22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Common Struggles (Grievers of Traumatic Loss)*

- Significant anxiety as a result of hyper-vigilance and the perceived loss of safety
- Preoccupation with issues of causality, responsibility and blame (including anger and personal guilt)
- Focus on issues of suffering and not being with the loved one at the time of death
- Feeling people cannot understand their grief

23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

*Common Struggles (Grievers of Traumatic Loss Through Suicide)*

**Shame:** “Will my loved one always be remembered by this one act?” “How will others treat me?”

**Anger:** “How could they do this to me?” “To our family?”

**Guilt:** “Was there something I could have done to prevent this?”

**Relief:** Which can lead to guilt

**Rejection:** “Why did you choose to leave me?” “What is wrong with me?”

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

**Styles of Grieving**

Styles impact the way individuals express and experience grief  
 An individual's personal style of grieving can occur anywhere along the continuum  
 Stronger tendencies toward one style will result in greater use of that style's coping strategies  
 People that rely on strategies from both domains may be said to have a "Blended"

X \_\_\_\_\_ X

Intuitive Blended Instrumental

(Doka & Martin)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

25

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

**Intuitive Style**

- Feelings and emotions are intensely experienced
- Need to express and experience feelings
- Tearful
- Body language expresses sadness
- Want to share inner experiences with others
- May experience prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate, disorganization
- Prone to physical exhaustion and or anxiety

**Instrumental Style**

- Thinking the preferred method for dealing with grief
- Feelings are less intense
- Desire to master feelings rather than express them
- General reluctance to talk about feelings
- Prefer to discuss problems
- Mastery of oneself and the environment are important
- Energy channeled into focused and problem solving activity

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

26

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

**Helping Grievers Deal with Anxiety**

- Rooted in suddenness/loss of assumptive world and helplessness
- Those exposed directly to the trauma and aftermath are at risk for developing PTSD and will likely need professional help
- Teach self-stabilization skills (self-soothing/grounding)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

27

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Helping Grievers Deal with **Anxiety**

- Address physical manifestations of anxiety through relaxation exercises and exercise
- Help griever identify helpless self-talk and replace with strength-based self talk
- Teach mindfulness skills
- Be vigilant for signs griever is self-medicating

28

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Helping Grievers Deal with **Guilt**

- Unresolved, can lead to depression or desire to self-harm
- If extended, can be a coping strategy to avoid other difficult emotions or moving forward
- Understandable, as griever is focused on deceased and events
- If "real guilt", address forgiveness. Writing a letter to the deceased may help

29

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Helping Grievers Deal with **Guilt**

- If "imagined guilt", discuss difference between guilt and regret
- Provide the tools to reality test
- Encourage the "head" to counsel the "heart"

30

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

## Helping Grievers Deal with Anger

- Needs to be expressed , not rehearsed.
- Often covers sadness or fear, which are experienced as more vulnerable emotions
- Explore directing anger in productive ways
- If sense underlying anger towards the deceased, gently ask questions such as:
  - "What don't you miss about him/her?"
  - "How did he/she disappoint you?"

31

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

8/22/2022 **MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

## Dealing with Flashbacks

-  Takes a good assessment and discernment on the part of the counselor
-  Relax/Replace technique
-  Importance of strength-based self-talk and grounding
-  EMDR can be very helpful

32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

## Helping Grievers Deal with Loneliness

- After most intense emotions subside, griever will usually be left with longing for the loved one for a lifetime
- Help grievers build competency with being alone
- Encourage extending support systems
- Build in plans for times loneliness is most acute

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Worden's Four Tasks of Grief

- To **acknowledge** the reality of the loss
- To **process** the pain of the loss
- To **adjust** to a world without the deceased
- To **find an enduring connection** with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life

Worden, 2018.

34

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Additional tips for helping

- Encourage realistic expectations for the grief process
- Encourage healthy self-care: nutrition, hydration, exercise, sleep, support
- Assist in finding meaning in the loss
- Facilitate goodbyes

35

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Just a word about **suicide**:

- Reassuring statistics: the vast number of grievors do not seriously consider suicide, make suicidal attempts, or complete suicide
- However, risk is higher in those grieving traumatic losses
- Many grievors talk about wanting to die
- Must take all references seriously and inquire further

36

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### Vicarious Grief and Trauma

- Genuine grief that is stimulated by someone else's loss
- Griever experiences assumptive world disruption – produces shattering of personal security and safety
- May need support in same fashion as those experiencing personal close loss

37

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

Every day is an opportunity to choose where we place our care.

Be sure to include yourself in that choice.



38

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### References

Barle, N., et al. (2017) Traumatic Bereavement: Basic Research and Clinical Implications. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 27,127-139.

Carson, J., et al. (2021). Losing a Loved One During the Covid-19 Pandemic: An On-Line Survey Looking at the Effects of Traumatic Stress, Coping and Post-Traumatic Growth. *Omega- Journal of Death and Dying*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228211049683>.

Doka, K., & Martin, T. (2010). *Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Grieve*. Routledge Publishing.

Keyes, K., et al. (2014). The Burden of Loss: Unexpected death of a loved one and psychiatric disturbances across the life course in a national study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 171 (8), 864-871.

39

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### References

Kristensen, P. et al. (2012). Bereavement and mental health after sudden and violent losses: A review. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 75 (1), 76-97.

Levine, S. (2006). *Recovering from Loss and Reviving the Heart*. Rodale Books.

Rando, T.A. (2021). *Twelve Core Strategies for Treating Traumatic Bereavement*. (Webinar, Hospice Foundation of America).

40

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

8/22/2022 **MOMENTUM** 2022 Annual Conference and Trade Show - August 30 - September 1, 2022 *LeadingAge Ohio*

### References

Worden, W. (2018). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy. 5th Edition: A Handbook for the Mental Health Professional*. Springer Publishing.

41

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---