

**EMC 340 Introduction to Clinical Medicine**

40 Death and Dying

David Trigg, MD

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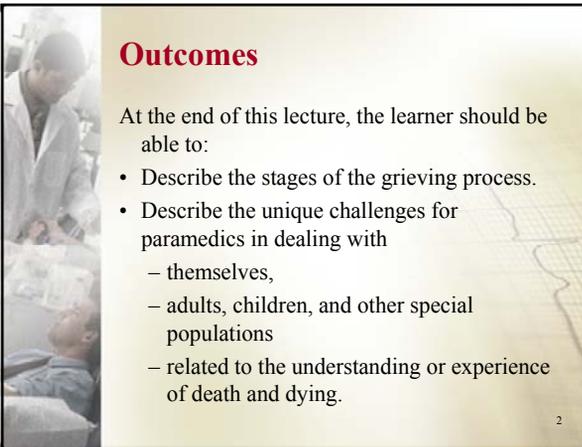
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**Outcomes**

At the end of this lecture, the learner should be able to:

- Describe the stages of the grieving process.
- Describe the unique challenges for paramedics in dealing with
  - themselves,
  - adults, children, and other special populations
  - related to the understanding or experience of death and dying.

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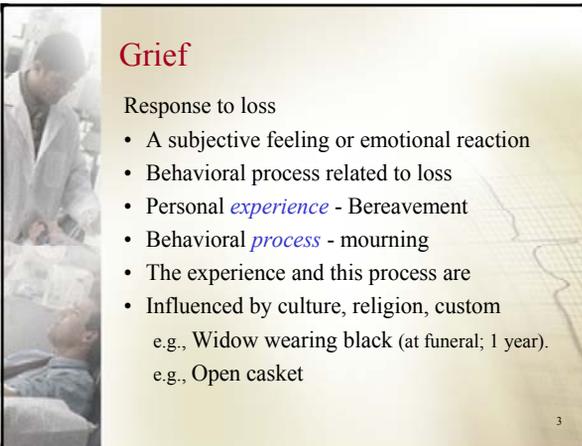
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**Grief**

Response to loss

- A subjective feeling or emotional reaction
- Behavioral process related to loss
- Personal *experience* - Bereavement
- Behavioral *process* - mourning
- The experience and this process are
- Influenced by culture, religion, custom
  - e.g., Widow wearing black (at funeral; 1 year).
  - e.g., Open casket

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## Loss and Grief

Loss

- Object - home
- Familiar environment - school; nursing home
- Significant other - family, life-partner
- Self concept / part of self
  - Body – paraplegia,...
  - Job – layoff, retirement
- Life

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## Loss and Grief

Loss

- Actual (apparent to others)
  - Paraplegia
- Perceived (+/- apparent to others)
  - Child care - loss of earning independence
- Anticipated (+/- apparent to others)
  - Diabetic foot, impending gangrene

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## Stages of Grief

1. Denial, “Not me!”
2. Anger, “Why me?”
3. Bargaining, “Okay, but first let me....”
4. Depression, “Okay, but I haven’t....”
5. Acceptance, “Okay, I’m not afraid.”

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## Signs of Grief

Repeated somatic distress

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## Child's Understanding of Death

3 years old (and under)

- View death as a separation or abandonment.
  - anger directed at loved one for not coming back
- Disturbed less by death than is the older child.
- Security: immediate family most important.
- Bases understanding on parents' response to the loss.

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## Child's Understanding of Death

Preschooler (3 to 6 years old)

- Views the world as reversible and temporary.
- "Magical thinking" – thoughts can change the world.
- Blame self when someone doesn't return.
- May experience nightmares or confusion on events around a person's death.
- Can revert to an earlier stage of development and seem to be unaffected by death.

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## Child's Understanding of Death

7 to 8 years old

- Beginning to see death as *final*.
- Begin to feel invincible. Death only occurs to others and in old age.
- Start to question what happens after death.
- May show an unusual interest in details surrounding death.

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## Children's Understanding of Death

Preteen (9 years old and up)

- Truly understands death in irreversible.
- Begin accepting the fact that death can happen to them also.
- Use most of the stages of grief.
- Grieve much like an adult, only it may show in acting-out behavioral changes.

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## Unpredictability

- Cannot predict how people will respond to a situation involving death (own or loved one).
- Safety is always your highest priority.
  - Be ready to take action as necessary.
    - You may need to leave the scene.
    - Involve law enforcement: PRN, early on.

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## Informing Family and Friends

- Paramedics: don't have chance for ED "1st warning"
- Find out who, at the scene, is family or close friends.
  - Gather them together.
- Try not to deliver the news of a death to a large group.
- Introduce yourself to everyone.
- Don't hesitate to use words like dead or died.
- Use gentle approach; eye contact.
- May use casual, respectable contact
  - Touching an arm or hand

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## Common Things to Say

- Your loved one has died.
- There is nothing more anyone could have done.
- We are available to assist you, if you need us.
- Call us back if you need anything.
- Let the family know about local procedures for out-of-hospital death.
- Avoid presumptive, possibly hurtful statements;
  - relief from pain,
  - God's will ..., etc.

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## Someone You Know

- In small communities, calls often involve people who the paramedics know personally.
- The family may be greatly relieved to see a familiar face.
- Try to find friendly and professional ways
  - To be supportive
  - to manage stress if the situation is overwhelming.
- You must grieve as well.

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## Summary

In summary, we have:

- Discussed the stages of grief.
- Described how children respond to death.
- Discussed ideas to keep in mind when informing others of death.

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