



Sub-module 4.6 - Factors influencing grief trajectories

Grief trajectories, as described by George Bonanno, are not determined randomly, but are influenced by a multitude of factors that shape the way each bereaved person will experience and adapt to loss. These factors can be individual, relational, contextual, or cultural, and their unique combination for each person contributes to the uniqueness of their grief journey. Understanding these different factors allows the GRIEF COACH to have a more complete and nuanced view of the experience of each bereaved person and to adjust their support accordingly.

Among the individual factors influencing grief trajectories, we can mention personality, coping strategies, resilience and the person's life history. People with extroverted, optimistic and flexible personalities may find it easier to adapt to loss and mobilize their support network, while introverted, pessimistic or rigid people may be more vulnerable to chronic or delayed grief. Likewise, people who have developed effective coping strategies, such as seeking support, expressing emotions or problem-solving, may be better equipped to cope with grief than those who tend to avoid, ruminate, or blame themselves. Resilience, that is, the ability to bounce back from adversity, is also a key factor that can foster a trajectory of resilience or recovery. Finally, the person's life history, especially their previous experiences with loss and trauma, can influence how they experience the current grief. For example, a person who has already experienced complicated grief in the past may be more at risk of developing chronic grief in the face of a new loss.

Relational factors, such as the nature and quality of the relationship with the deceased, social support, and family dynamics, also play an important role in grief trajectories. The loss of a particularly close and significant relationship, such as that of a child, spouse or

twin, may be more difficult to overcome than that of a more distant or conflicted relationship. Likewise, the presence of a strong, empathetic, and available social support network can promote a trajectory of resilience or recovery, while the absence or failure of this support can increase the risk of chronic or delayed grief. Family dynamics, especially communication, cohesion, and the flexibility of the family system in the face of loss, can also influence the grief trajectories of each of its members. For example, in a family where communication is open and emotions are freely expressed, bereaved members may find it easier to adjust to the loss than in a family where grief is a taboo subject.

Contextual factors, like the circumstances of death, concurrent stressors, and available resources, can also influence grief trajectories. A sudden, violent, premature or stigmatized death can be more difficult to integrate than an expected and peaceful death and can increase the risk of chronic, delayed or complicated grief. Likewise, the presence of concurrent stressors, such as financial difficulties, health problems, or family conflicts, can overload the adaptive capacities of the bereaved person and hinder their grieving process. Conversely, access to adequate resources, like psychological support, bereavement leave, or practical aid, can facilitate adaptation to loss and promote a trajectory of resilience or recovery. For example, a bereaved person who has psychotherapeutic follow-up and a suitable work schedule may find it easier to get through their grief than a lonely, overwhelmed person.

Finally, cultural factors, like norms, rituals, and beliefs surrounding death and grieving, can significantly influence grief trajectories. Each culture conveys specific expectations about the expression of grief, the duration of mourning, or the maintenance of ties with the deceased, which can facilitate or hinder the adaptive process. For example, in a culture where mourning is ritualized and socially recognized, bereaved people may feel more supported and legitimate in their grief than in a culture where mourning is privatized and minimized. Similarly, cultural or religious beliefs about the afterlife, reincarnation or the meaning of death can influence how bereaved people make sense of their loss and find comfort. For example, a person who believes in eternal life may find tranquility in their grief compared to someone confronted with the notion of nothingness.

The GRIEF COACH must be attentive to these different factors that influence grief trajectories and explore them with each bereaved person. They can help the person identify the risk and protective factors present in their situation, mobilize their resources, and find coping strategies in line with their needs and values. They can also make the person's surroundings aware of the impact of these factors and encourage suitable support. By considering the complexity and uniqueness of each grief journey, the GRIEF COACH can offer tailor-made support, which values each individual's strengths and promotes a personalized healing trajectory.

It is important to note that these factors are not absolute determinants of grief trajectories, but influences that interact uniquely for each person. Certain factors may carry heavier

weight than others depending on individuals and situations. Furthermore, the presence of a risk factor does not doom one to a difficult trajectory, just as the absence of protective factors does not guarantee a serene trajectory. Each bereaved person has the ability to adapt and find their own path to resilience, provided they have compassionate and adjusted support. The role of the GRIEF COACH is to provide this support, based on a fine understanding of the factors influencing grief trajectories.

Key points to remember:

- Grief trajectories are influenced by a unique combination of individual, relational, contextual, and cultural factors specific to each bereaved person.
- Individual factors, include personality, coping strategies, resilience and life history. They can either facilitate or hinder adaptation to loss.
- Relational factors, such as the nature of the relationship with the deceased, social support, and family dynamics, play a significant role in the experience of grief.
- Contextual factors, such as the circumstances of the death, concurrent stressors, and available resources, can influence the ability to cope with the loss.
- Cultural factors, including norms, rituals, and beliefs related to grief, shape the expression and sense given to the loss.
- The GRIEF COACH must explore these different factors with each bereaved person in order to offer personalized support that takes into account the uniqueness of their journey.
- It can help the person identify risk and protective factors, mobilize their resources, and find suitable coping strategies.
- Although these factors influence grief trajectories, they do not determine them in an absolute manner. Each individual has the capacity to adapt and find their way to resilience with support that is adjusted to their needs.