



Sub-module 7.3 - Grief Coaching for Individuals with Serious or Terminal Illnesses

The accompaniment of individuals with serious or terminal illnesses is a particular challenge for the GRIEF COACH, as it involves working with individuals facing anticipated mourning of their own life and plans. These individuals often experience a succession of losses, such as loss of their health, their independence, their social role, or their self-image, which can trigger intense and complex emotions. They are also faced with existential questions about the meaning of their life, their legacy, and their impending death, which can shake their beliefs and values.

In the face of these challenges, the role of the GRIEF COACH is to offer an authentic, empathetic, and non-judgmental presence, allowing the sick person to freely express their thoughts and emotions. It is essential to create a safe space for dialogue, where the individual can share fears, doubts, regrets, or hopes, without fear of being judged or minimized. The coach can help them put words to their experience, explore their inner resources, and find meaning in this ordeal, respecting their beliefs and values. They can also encourage them to express their needs and wishes, both medically, relationally, or spiritually.

A particularly relevant tool in this context is the work on "legacy", which allows the sick individual to reflect on what they wish to pass on to their loved ones and posterity. This can take the form of a life story, a letter, or a video recording, where they share their memories, values, advice, or hopes for the future. This process can help them find meaning in their existence, feel recognized and valued, and lighten the emotional burden of their loved ones. The GRIEF COACH can accompany them in this process, helping them to structure their reflection, choose the appropriate mediums, and express their message authentically.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to explore with the sick individual their fears and concerns about end of life and death. Many terminally ill individuals express anxieties related to pain, loss of dignity, dependence, or loneliness. Others question what lies beyond death according to their spiritual or religious beliefs. The GRIEF COACH can help them navigate these questions by inviting them to express their emotions, clarify their wishes, and mobilize their resources. They can also inform them about palliative care and end-of-life support options so they can make informed choices and serenely anticipate their last moments.

In this process, collaboration with loved ones and caregivers is essential, as they are often the first witnesses and the primary support for the sick individual. The GRIEF COACH can help them communicate openly and empathetically with their loved one, express their own emotions and needs, and find a balance between support and respect for their autonomy. They can also advise them on how to accompany end of life, create moments of connection, and say goodbye. Lastly, they can guide them toward suitable resources, such as support groups, associations, or specialized professionals, to support them in their own grieving journey.

A touching example of this type of accompaniment is that of Marie, a 60-year-old woman with terminal cancer, who I followed as a GRIEF COACH. Over the course of our exchanges, Marie was able to express her fears regarding pain and loss of dignity, as well as her questions about the afterlife. We explored together her spiritual resources, her precious memories, and her hopes for her loved ones. Marie chose to create a photo album with captions for her grandchildren to pass on her love and values. She also clarified her end-of-life wishes with her husband and children, which eased their anxieties and strengthened their bonds. Concurrently, I suggested that her family participate in a support group for spouses of sick individuals, so they could be supported in their own journey.

Accompanying individuals with serious or terminal illness is both a privilege and a responsibility for the GRIEF COACH. It requires considerable emotional maturity, the ability to be present with uncertainty and suffering, and a deep humanity. It is an intense and transformative journey, which confronts us with our own mortality and invites us to fully live each moment. By offering a loving presence, deep listening, and tangible support to these individuals and their loved ones, we can help them cross this ultimate stage with dignity, serenity, and gratitude. We can accompany them in their quest for meaning, for connection, and for inner peace until the end of their life path.

Key points to remember:

- Accompanying individuals with serious or terminal illnesses involves working with the anticipated mourning of their own life. They often experience a succession of losses and profound existential questions.

- The role of the GRIEF COACH is to provide an authentic, empathetic, and non-judgmental presence, creating a safe dialogue space to freely express thoughts and emotions.
- A relevant tool is the work on the "legacy", enabling the individual to reflect on what they wish to pass on (life story, letter, video...) to find meaning and lighten the burden of loved ones.
- It is crucial to explore fears and concerns about end of life and death (pain, loss of dignity, loneliness, spiritual questions...) by helping with these questions and informing about support options.
- Collaboration with loved ones and caregivers is key for open and empathetic communication, helping them to find a balance between support and respect for autonomy, and guiding them towards appropriate resources.
- This accompaniment requires great emotional maturity and deep humanity from the GRIEF COACH. It's an intense journey that invites full presence to each moment, offering presence, listening, and concrete support until the end of life's path.