

Challenges and Resilience in the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Exploring Grief and Bereavement Through a Holistic Lens

Presented by: Geoff Straw, RP & Carma MacKenzie, RN RP



Life and Death Matters

Meet our founders



- Life and Death Matters was founded in 2005 by Kath and Ted Murray
 - Their mission: to improve care for the dying through delivery of
 - comprehensive palliative resources
 - training
 - support
 - Clients include healthcare students, Instructors, informal and formal caregivers
 - Nationally recognized for their contribution to palliative care education
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Geoff Straw

Geoff Straw is a Registered Psychotherapist (Ontario) and a Registered Clinical Counsellor (B.C.) with 35 years of experience in providing therapy and support to individuals, groups, and workplaces. He specializes in providing support to caregivers as well as to individuals who are coping with illness and end-of-life care, as well as comprehensive grief and bereavement support.

Geoff also has a keen interest in promoting well-being through talk therapy, mindfulness practice and the reduction of anxiety for various life circumstance and transition. Geoff supports well-being in the 2SLGBTQ+ community and specialize in issues unique to men. Geoff brings a holistic approach to assisting clients, acknowledging the spiritual aspects of your unique path and the wisdom of your journey.



Carma Mackenzie

Carma Mackenzie is a Registered Nurse and Registered Psychotherapist with over 30 years of experience in palliative care. Throughout their career, they have been dedicated to providing compassionate, person-centered support to individuals and families navigating serious illness, grief, and loss. Their clinical and therapeutic work is grounded in trauma-informed, inclusive practice, with a particular focus on the unique grief and bereavement experiences within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Carma is committed to fostering safer, affirming spaces in end-of-life care through education, advocacy, and meaningful engagement with diverse communities.





Learning Objectives

- Understand the unique grief and bereavement experiences within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities
 - Explore systemic challenges impacting these experiences
 - Highlight sources of resilience and community care
 - Introduce a holistic, inclusive approach to palliative and grief support
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Defining Grief and Bereavement

Grief is multi-faceted and whole person response to loss

Bereavement is the condition of having lost a loved one to death

***Death is not the greatest loss in life;
the greatest loss is what dies inside
us while we live***

Norman Cousins

2SLGBTQIA+

2S	Two Spirit
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
T	Trans
QIA	Queer, Intersex, Asexual
+	Anything else that falls outside of these terms





The 2SLGBTQIA+ Experience of Loss

Disenfranchised grief is grief that is not acknowledged or validated by society

- Loss of chosen family
 - Complicated relationships with biological families
 - Loss connected to identity-based trauma
(e.g., rejection, violence, discrimination)
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Why This Matters

- Disproportionate experiences of disenfranchised grief
 - Historical and ongoing discrimination in healthcare
 - Importance of inclusive, affirming grief support
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Systemic Challenges

- Lack of culturally proficient providers
 - Legal and social barriers (e.g., partner recognition, funeral access)
 - Fear of discrimination in palliative/hospice settings
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Holistic Approaches to Grief

- Integrating physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Affirming language and practices
 - Community-based healing modalities
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Trauma-Informed Care

- Bereavement support and trauma informed care
 - Losses experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ individuals throughout the life span
 - Awareness of the challenges and differences of each generation in the quest for wholeness
 - Canada protects the rights of transgendered people through the Canadian human rights act
 - Policy changes may threaten those rights
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All of us are put into boxes by our family, by our religion, by our society, our moment in history, even our own bodies. Some people have the courage to break free.

Geena Rocero, advocate

It's OK that you're not OK

- Grief is the response to love and loss
 - Our culture tends to treat grief like an illness to be cured
 - Well-meaning advice may make it more difficult for grievers
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Michael's Story

Michael, a 62-year-old man, recently lost his husband, Charlie, to a terminal illness.

Charlie had been receiving palliative care at home, allowing them to spend his final days together in a familiar, loving environment.

While the gradual decline gave Micheal time to prepare emotionally, the reality of the loss has still been devastating.





Micheal's Story continued

Micheal is also struggling with conflict from Charlie's biological family. Though they were aware of the marriage, they never fully acknowledged or accepted Micheal as Charlie's spouse.

Since Charlie's passing, they have excluded Micheal from funeral planning, disregarding his role in Charlie's life

The family's actions have intensified Micheal's grief, making him feel erased from Charlie's legacy.

Reflection

Other than the death of Charlie, what else contributed to Micheal's grief?

What else might help support Michael within his grief experience?



Desired Outcome

Through trauma-informed support, Michael begins to reclaim his grief and honor Charlie in ways that feel meaningful to him.

While the exclusion from funeral planning remains painful, he finds ways to commemorate Charlie's life in his own way.

By processing the emotional and relational aspects of grief, Michael gradually learns to integrate his loss into his life, moving toward healing while holding space for love and remembrance.



Barriers to support

- Isolation is significantly greater in 2SLGBTQ+ seniors than in the non-queer/trans seniors' community
 - 2020 survey indicated that 48% of queer and trans seniors had not told their primary care provider about their sexual/gender identity
 - Lack of community bereavement supports for queer individuals
 - Groups may not be welcoming
 - A sense of abandonment may be re experienced in seeking grief support
 - Fear of judgement from others
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Resilient Grieving

- Chosen family networks
 - Cultural and community strength
 - Activism and legacy-building
 - Intersectional support (BIPOC, disability, Newcomer and vulnerably housed experiences within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities)
 - Understanding that suffering and loss are a part of life
 - Choosing where to place your focus
 - Is this helping or harming me?
 - Social support
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Grief

I had my own notion of grief. I thought it was a sad time, that followed the death of someone you love. And you had to push through it to get to the other side. But I'm learning, there is no other side.....

There is no pushing through, but rather, there is absorption.

Adjustment

Acceptance

And grief is not something you complete, but rather you endure. Grief is not a task to finish, and move on, but an element of yourself – an alteration of your being

By Gwen Flowers

Queer Resilience

- Skills and abilities learned and developed because of adversarial experiences of prejudice and discrimination
- Supportive relationships (chosen family)
- Community connectedness
- Self acceptance



Fostering acceptance, comfort and belonging

- Honor preferred pronouns; use language that promotes equity, safety and belonging
 - Don't assume heterosexuality or gender
 - Re-visit intake forms and assessment process
 - Include 2SLGBTQ+ symbols on website and in other spaces
 - Consider training in providing support and seek to understand 2SLGBTQ+ history
 - Establish in house supports including one-on-one and groups
 - Use inclusive intake forms
 - Validate chosen families and identities
 - Seek continued education on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues
 - Advocate within systems
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Resources

- Local and national 2SLGBTQIA+ grief or palliative care resources
- Suggested readings and toolkits
- Peer support options

In Vancouver:

- Health Initiative for Men (HIM): health-based programs and services to strengthen the well-being of GBQ men and gender diverse people
 - Qmunity: queer, trans and two spirit folks looking for a sense of community; offering youth, seniors and counselling and education programs
 - Dignity Seniors Society: supporting 2SLGBTQ+ seniors and those who work with them; advocate, educate and collaborate
 - Spiritual communities: Queer Dharma, United and Anglican church groups
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Let's Reflect

Questions & Answers





Thank You
