Disenfranchised Grief

Grief becomes disenfranchised when individuals are denied the opportunity to grieve openly, lack the social support necessary to process their loss, or do not receive the validation needed to heal. In these circumstances, the grieving person may withdraw from others, question whether their grief is legitimate, struggle to accept the loss and its consequences, or have difficulty adapting in healthy ways. When grief is pushed into silence, the emotional burden becomes more intense and isolating. This increases the risk of developing prolonged grief disorder, depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.

Disenfranchised grief can arise from a variety of sources—cultural norms, societal expectations, the attitudes of others, and even from the griever's own internal beliefs. At times, professionals in "expert" roles may also contribute to this sense of invalidation, often unintentionally.
Because all mental health professionals work with grieving individuals, it is critical to recognize the signs of disenfranchisement, understand its impact on the mourning process, and learn how to avoid reinforcing it. Clinicians must be equipped to offer validation, support, and effective interventions to help clients navigate the social dynamics that can complicate their grief—especially when those dynamics are shaped by misunderstanding or judgment.
This workshop will include both didactic instruction and case studies to give attendees practical tools for addressing disenfranchised grief in clinical practice.

Target Audience

Psychologists Social Workers Counselors
Therapists Psychiatrists Nurses
Course level: Intermediate

Learning Objectives

At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:
1. Define and recognize disenfranchised grief
2. Identify the ways in which grievers are disenfranchised
3. Explain how disenfranchisement impacts the grieving process
4. Explain how cultural expectations of the grieving process may lead to disenfranchised grief
5. Apply interventions to decrease the risk of disenfranchisement

Seminar Schedule

The webinar outline is attached. See the Live Webinar page for the start and end times.

Outline

10:00 - 10:15 AM
Welcome, Objectives & Clinical Framing

10:15 - 10:45 AM
Foundations of Grief & Meaning Disruption

10:45 - 11:15 AM
Disenfranchised Grief: Theory & Typologies

11:15 - 11:30 AM
Clinical Impact & Presentation Patterns

11:30 - 11:45 AM
Questions & Discussion

11:45 AM - 12:00 PM
Break (15 Minutes)

12:00 - 12:30 PM
Experiential Reflection & Professional Application

12:30 - 1:00 PM
Reclaiming Narrative & Meaning Reconstruction

1:00 - 1:15 PM
Clinical Interventions & Integration
Ends 1:15 PM ET

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The Presenter

Christina Zampitella Psy.D., FT is a licensed clinical psychologist, Fellow of Thanatology, and founder and owner of The Center for Grief and Trauma Therapy. She often works as an adjunct professor, professional speaker, and especially enjoys training emerging mental health professionals. Dr. Zampitella is the host of her podcast, Phoenix Rising with Dr. Z. She focuses her clinical practice, research, course development, and teaching on bereavement studies, nature-based therapy, and integrative psychology. She served as the chair for the Continuing Education Committee for several professional institutions and is an advisory board member of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and the Integrative Psychology Program at National University. She is the former resident psychologist for Fox 5 News in San Diego, and often appeared on NBC News. She has appeared in Elle Magazine, BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post, New York Post, and several Delaware Magazines and newspapers in Delaware.

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This seminar has been reviewed and approved by Keith Hannan, Ph.D., Laura Davie, LICSW, Tina Jenkins, Psy.D., and Loreen Yearick, MSN, RN. This approval expires on March 1, 2028.

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