

**The National Association of Christians in Social Work
Hartford, CT.**

**Workshop
Spirituality and Trauma Dimensions in Social Work
and
Pastoral Care**

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Workshop Mission

- To provide a safe and confidential space for participants to discuss their experiences and challenges in providing social work care to religious client/s;
- To assist participants with developing a model for a Trauma Informed Social Work practice in the Christian Context by identifying and using theological, biblical and social support systems, church and community resources to help those suffering from traumatic experiences;
- To explore some of the characteristics of a Trauma Informed Social Work in a Christian Context and a religiously and spiritually informed social work practice; and
- To explore self-care practices.

Sitting with a Shattered Soul

So how do you sit with a shattered soul?

Gently, with gracious and deep respect.
Patiently, for time stands still for the shattered, and
the momentum of healing will be slow at first.

With the tender strength that comes from an openness
to your own deepest wounding,
and to your own deepest healing.

Firmly, never wavering in the utmost conviction that
evil is powerful, but there is a good
that is more powerful still.

Stay connected to that goodness with all your being,
however it manifests itself to you.

Give freely. Take in abundantly.

Find your safety, your refuge, and go there as you need.

Words won't always come;
sometimes there are no words
in the face of such tragic evil.
But in your own willingness to be with them,
they will hear you;
from soul to soul
they will hear that for which there are no words.

When you can, in your own time,
turn and face that deep chasm within.
Let go. Grieve, rage, shed.

Basic Perspectives of Trauma: Frameworks

- Psychosocial developmental: gender, sexual identity and culture;
- Spiritual;
- Theological; and
- Sense of Self, values and value conflicts.

Basic Perspectives on Trauma: Frameworks, Cont.

Trauma and...

- Grief
- Depression
- Resilience and growth

Life Before





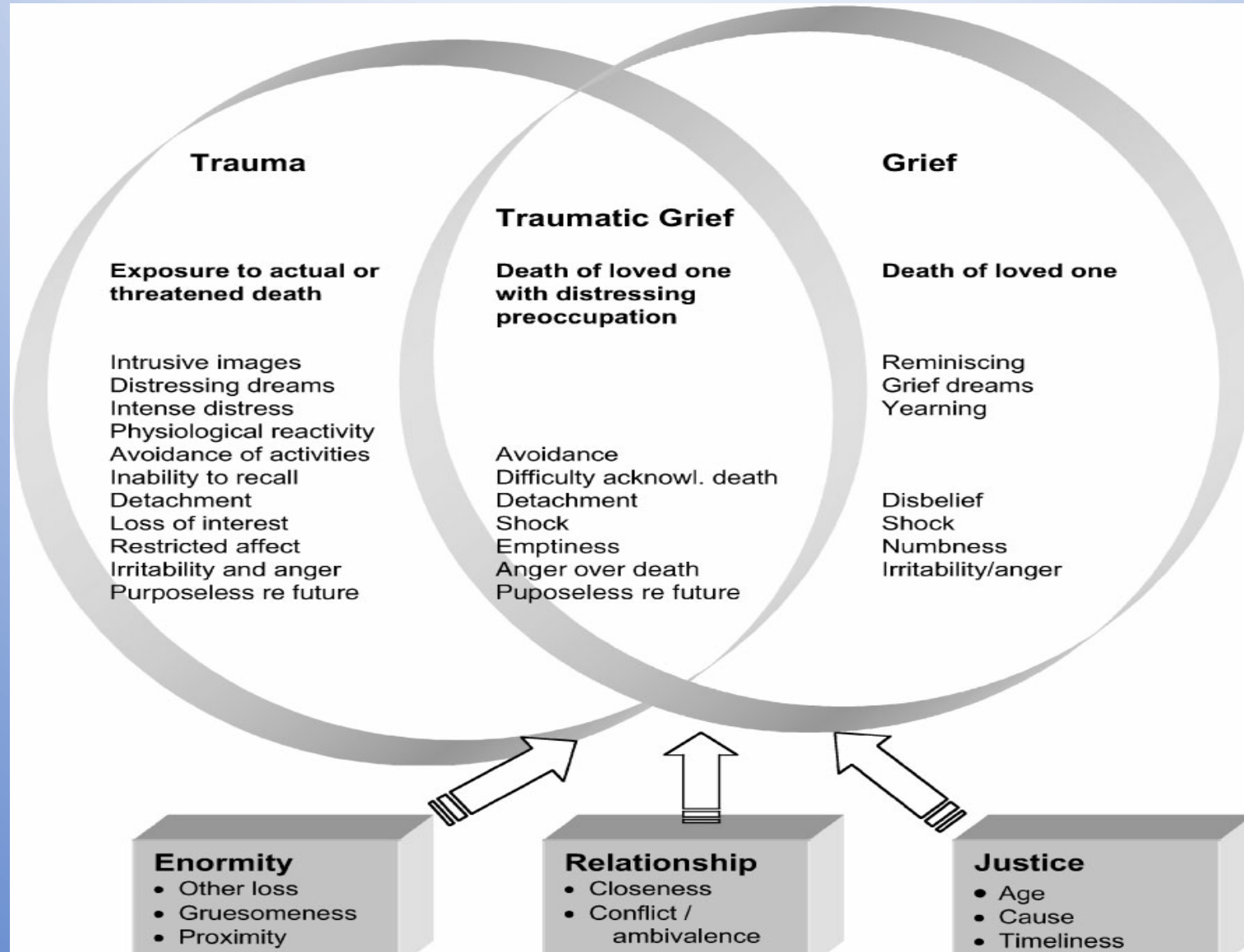
The Meaning of Trauma

- Trauma results from adverse life experiences that overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope and to adapt positively to whatever threat he or she faces...
- Trauma exposure's lasting impact represents a combination of the event and the subjective thoughts and feelings it engenders.
- An event becomes traumatic when its adverse effect produces feelings of helplessness and lack of control, and thoughts that one's survival may possibly be in danger". Council on Social Work Education (2013, CSWE.org)

Trauma and PTSD

- A person who has had a traumatic experience can develop signs of PTSD.
- They can also show signs of depression, anger, a profound sense of vulnerability and loss of optimism and hope minus some of the other features normally associated with the cluster of symptoms suggesting a diagnosis of PTSD.
- The negative impact of trauma can become multigenerational when not identified and dealt with early.
- PTSD symptoms cluster into three groups:
 1. Intrusion of memories
 2. Constriction or numbing of feeling about the trauma
 3. Arousal of central nervous system

Trauma and Grief



Witnessing the Suffering That Remains (Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma)

- Vicarious or Secondary Trauma
- Compassion Fatigue
- Trauma and Countertransference

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma is caused by the cumulative effect of bearing witness to the suffering of others.

Impact of Vicarious Trauma

- Distressing thoughts;
- Having feelings similar to people we are helping;
- Intrusive thoughts and images; and
- Avoiding situations that reminds us of the suffering.

Forgiving
Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu
The Book of Forgiving

Why Forgive?

- It benefits our health;
- Offers freedom from the past, a perpetrator and future victimization;
- Heals families and communities;
- We forgive so we don't suffer, physically or mentally, the corrosive effects of holding on to anger and resentment;
- We are all connected and have a shared humanity; and
- Forgiveness is a gift we give to ourselves.

What Forgiveness Is not

- Forgiveness is not easy.
- Forgiveness is not weakness.
- Forgiveness does not subvert justice.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting.
- Forgiveness is not quick.

Forgiving, Cont.

Forgiving Is a Process and a Practice

- Telling the story.
- Naming the hurt.
- Granting Forgiveness.
- Renewing or Releasing the Relationship.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context

Social work providers have a basic understanding of the nature of trauma and how it may impact the overall quality of life of the person or persons who have been traumatized by a life event and the impact of that trauma on their relationships with other people and God.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

Seeks to sensitively use a basic understanding of trauma and reflect upon its implications for the various aspects of how people may experience being a member of a faith community.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

Encourages that social workers be aware of the impact of trauma upon persons depending upon where they are in their faith journey and along the life-cycle, age, gender, social and marital status and sexual orientation.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context attempts to bring to bear upon assisting those suffering from trauma their understanding of the wisdom, insights and resources of their religious faith and tradition and how might they utilize these cultural attributes for the sufferer's benefit.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

Collaborates with other community members who can provide additional resources and to whom the social worker can refer those needing assistance in coping with their traumatic experiences.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

Aims to increase the skills of coping with or reducing the stress that can otherwise lead the sufferer to feel that they can no longer manage or prevent their traumatic and post traumatic experiences from destroying them. Those who have been traumatized need to be encourage and supported in being hopeful about their own recovery from having been traumatized.

Trauma Informed Social Work In the Christian Context, Cont.

The shame that some people feel as a result of being traumatized prevents them from seeking help. Social workers and religious helpers can play a vital role in reducing this shame by reminding those suffering from trauma that there is no shame in getting help, that in fact doing so is a sign of their strength.

Glossary of Terms for Social Workers In the Christian Context

- Religiosity
- Spirituality
- Counseling and the religious client
- Counseling and the religious counselor
- Pastoral Counseling

Religion and Religiosity

A definition of religion found in Webster's dictionary is *'relating to or manifesting faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality.*

Definitions of religion are always contextual and provisional (Canda and Furman, 1999. *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping.* New York: Free Press), observe: *Our definitions are affected by our life situation, sociocultural conditioning, and self-understanding. Since these change overtime, our personal definitions of spirituality and religion may change as well.*

Religion and Religiosity Definition, Cont.

Sheridan (2003) gives this simple definition of religion, “religion refers to a set of belief, practices, and traditions experienced within a specific social institution over time.”

Sheridan, M. (2003). The spiritual person. In E. D. Hutchison (Ed.), *Dimension of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course* (pp. 183–225). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Religion and Religiosity Definition, Cont.

A person is religious when they believe in a deity and that belief is informed by a system of beliefs in and adherence to doctrines or dogmas. This is often accompanied by their involvement with rituals and living according to a code of ethics and conduct, all of which influences the believers' view of reality, conceptions of the truth, perspectives on life and its meaning, human nature, and the cosmos. The meaning of these beliefs and actions are filtered through the cultural context and gender of the believer and may include ancestral and other cultural traditions. Matters of religious beliefs shapes the believer's way of life and personal and communal identity.

Spirituality

A sense of spirituality, that is, our awareness of being a part of the created order of things and something much larger than ourselves or what we can create and conceive, can inspire a sense of awe, wonder, meaning, and simultaneously a feeling of significance and relevance of one's life.

Spirituality can be sensed and experienced either through or independent of our acts of religious devotion and lifestyle.

Spirituality Defined, Cont.

Spirituality is an inner sense of relationship to a higher power that is loving and guiding. The word we give to this higher power might be God, nature, spirit, the universe, the creator, or other words that represent a divine presence. But the important point is that spirituality encompasses our relationship and dialogue with this higher presence...Spiritual development...is the growth and progression of our inborn spirituality as one of our many perceptual and intellectual faculties, from taste and touch to critical thinking skills.

Lisa Miller. (2015). *The Spiritual Child*

Counseling And The Religious Client

People who seek the assistance of social workers come to them as whole persons, (body, mind, and soul). Taking them seriously includes attempting to understand what they consider to be ultimate truths in their lives.

Counseling And The Religious Client

Social workers are to be aware of and acknowledge their religious biases in delivering their professional services. They use this awareness when providing a social work service in the best interest of their clients. Social workers are to remove themselves or refer the client to someone else when their views about religion prohibit them from performing a professional social work function.

Counseling And The Religious Client, Cont.

Exploring religious beliefs, values, and spiritual practices of clients is not about what the social worker believes nor is it his or her lack of religious belief. Social workers use their awareness of their feelings, attitudes, and biases about religion to facilitate their client's understanding of the religious nature of their experiences.

Counseling And The Religious Client, Cont.

It is very important within the clinical social work contexts that social workers learn from their clients about the meaning and place of religion in their lives. The client “as a teacher” is an invaluable role for them to assume in the social worker/client relationship. It enhances the social worker’s ability to connect with and understand their clients, their needs, and the religious resources that they rely on. The client as a teacher represents a shift in the traditional understanding of the helper/client relationship.

(Mollica, R. F. (2006). *Healing invisible wounds: Paths to hope and recovery in a violent world*. New York: Harcourt.)

Social Work Counseling and Pastoral Care

One of the most helpful things that therapy can do with regard to spirituality is not to change the client's view but to amplify it or bring it to sharper focus so that the client may scrutinize it more carefully and decide whether it truly fits the individual circumstance of life and current self-understanding.

Cornett, C. (1998). *The Soul of Psychotherapy: Recapturing the Spiritual Dimension in the Therapeutic Encounter*. New York: Free Press.

Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling “cannot change the facts of poverty or other injustice, abuse, oppression, alcoholism, psychosis, cancer, atheism or depression. But pastoral counseling is profoundly committed and effective in energizing people to address such facts, changing what they can and coping creatively as they must. *Dittes, James (1999). Pastoral Counseling: The Basics* (Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky)

Pastoral Counseling, Cont.

Pastoral counseling aspires to enable people to take their place as responsible citizens of God's world, as agents of God's redemptive hope for that world...To reclaim commitment and clarity, to beget faith, hope, and love, to find life affirmed- this is the conversion of soul that sometimes happens in pastoral counseling .

Common Religious Self-Care Affirmations

- ...All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.

Job 14:14

- ...Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.

Psalm 30:5

- ...I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

Matthew 28:20

Engaging the Religious Client

The social worker explores how the client chooses to live his or her life and what the sources are that sustain and give him or her hope and meaning for living. It is well for social workers to explore this aspect of their client's lives by asking them questions like the ones suggested by Canda and Furman (1999):

- Do you consider yourself to be religious or spiritual in some way?
- What sustains and gives you hope?
- Are you involved with any volunteer activities?
- Do you have any hobbies or special interests or skills that you enjoy?

Engaging the Religious Client, Cont.

- What does spirituality means to you?
- What are some of your memories of spirituality and religion in early childhood?
- What is your understanding of religion and spirituality now?
- How did you get there?
- Where do you want to go?

Summary

- A traumatic event can reconfigure our imagination, affecting our ability to tell life giving stories about ourselves that lead to our flourishing.
- Violence of any kind can impact one's understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God (the Imago Dei), how they perceive themselves (self-esteem) and how others view them.

Summary, Cont.

- Social workers may want to explore with their religious clients who have been victims of violence how sermons and other aspects of congregational life impact their sense of being a member of a church.
- A trauma and spirituality informed social work practice supports the healing mission of the church.

Summary, Cont.

The values people derive from religion gives texture to their identity and self-esteem. It contributes to their sense of cultural continuity and serves as a defense against what they perceive and experience as oppressive. There are those who seem more confident about their convictions than others.

Summary, Cont.

The religiosity of a client may be well integrated into their self-understanding and pose some difficulty for the social worker/client relationship regardless of the social worker's own personal or professional view of religion. Social workers are encouraged to show, in a nonjudgmental way, interests in the person's religious orientation to life.

What I Want You to Know

What I Want You to Know

(From the heart of trauma survivor)

I want you to know:

Your job is not to deliver me from hurting.

It is to provide empathy, spiritual guidance, and to be a reflection of the qualities of God to empower me.

To remind me of who I am in relationship to God.

To bear tangible testimony to the existence and nature of God in the midst of the pain....

So I might have peace even while I still hurt...

You don't need to answer all my questions,

Just be there when I ask them

And maybe you can be there along the way...as I gradually find the answer for myself.

—A survivor