

Grief & Bereavement Literacy Series

Honouring Grief in LTC Communities: Struggles and Strategies

Presenters:

Lisa Dawson, Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC

Gita Rafiee, Community and Complex Care Fraser Health

Naoko Watanabe, Minoru Residence

Grace Hu, BC Centre for Palliative Care

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The BC Centre for Palliative Care works with humility and respect alongside partners across the land, colonially known as British Columbia.

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of many distinct First Nations, whose values continue to guide us.

We also recognize Métis people and Métis Chartered Communities, as well as the Inuit and urban Indigenous peoples living across the province on various traditional territories.



Introductions

Presenters

Lisa Dawson

President

Independent Long-Term Care Councils
Association of BC

Gita Rafiee, BScN, MN, GNC(C), CNCA

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Seniors
Community and Complex Care
Fraser Health

Naoko Watanabe, MSW, RCSW

Social Worker

Minoru Residence

Grace Hu, MPH

Research Coordinator

BC Centre for Palliative Care

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

Describe the struggles with grief experienced by residents, families, and staff in long-term care: recognize the types of grief present

Identify strategies that support healthy grieving in LTC communities

Understand how and where to access BC-based grief and bereavement resources

Why grief in long-term care matters



Ongoing decline,
often the place that
residents die



Residents live in
LTC for months or
years: relationships
develop



Grief is often
hidden or
unacknowledged

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One of the things that... that I would really value is just making end-of-life a visible component of long-term care. I don't know the data at this point, but most residents, who are in long-term care will experience end of life in that facility... that seems quite absent in the particular long-term care facility that my mom is in.

*- Focus Group with People with Lived Experience,
BCCPC Long-Term Care Collaborative*

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It seemed, surprising to me that there was so little, defined around that whole experience, when a loved one dies, how... much time do you have to get everything out of the room? You know, those things matter, and again, you know, they [staff] may not be the folks to provide the frontline grief support, but what are the grief supports/resources in the community, so that's a handout that's ready.

*- Focus Group with People with Lived Experience,
BCCPC Long-Term Care Collaborative*



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time

Grief isn't good or bad, or right or wrong. Grief just is.



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

Types of Grief



Visible grief – decline and death of a loved one



Invisible grief – loss of privacy, independence, etc.

Grief in LTC

Disenfranchised grief – grief that is not acknowledged

Anticipatory grief

Cumulative grief

Ambiguous loss

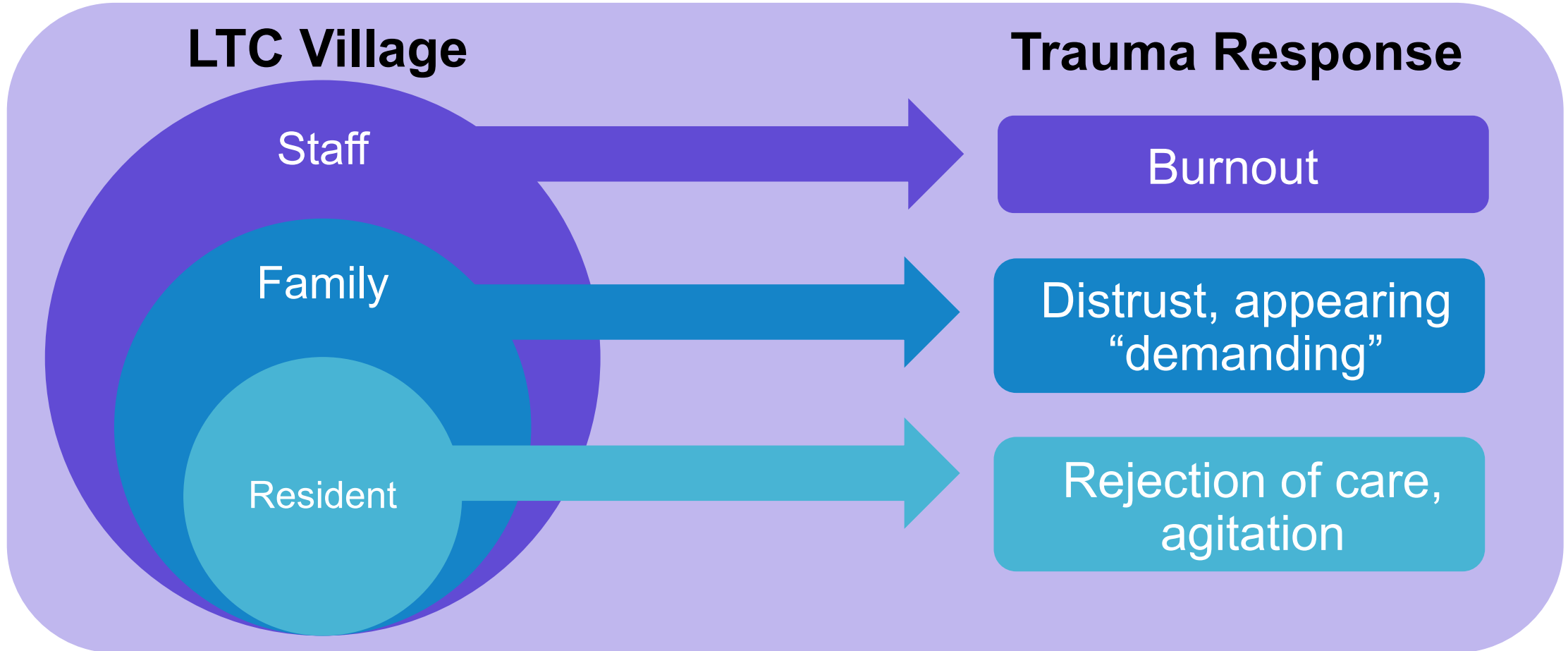
Masked grief

Disorientation and disenchantment

Complicated grief

Grief and Trauma

Grief can activate, reactivate, or compound past trauma





Experiences of Residents

Struggles



Fear: safety, uncertainty

Lack of support for changes

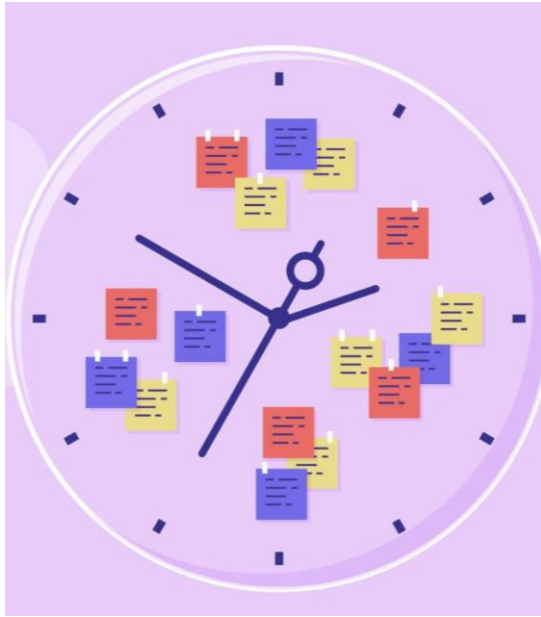
Loss of routines, lifestyle

Loss of self: roles, identity

Loneliness

Strategies

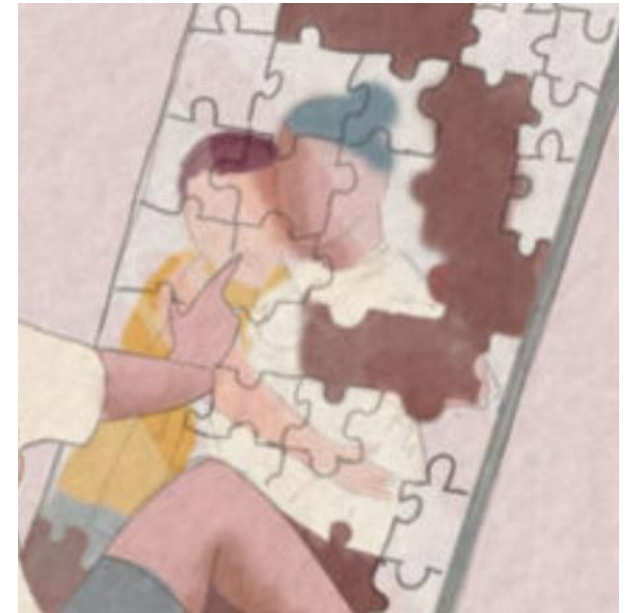
Slow transitions



Trauma-informed care



Support across LTC village

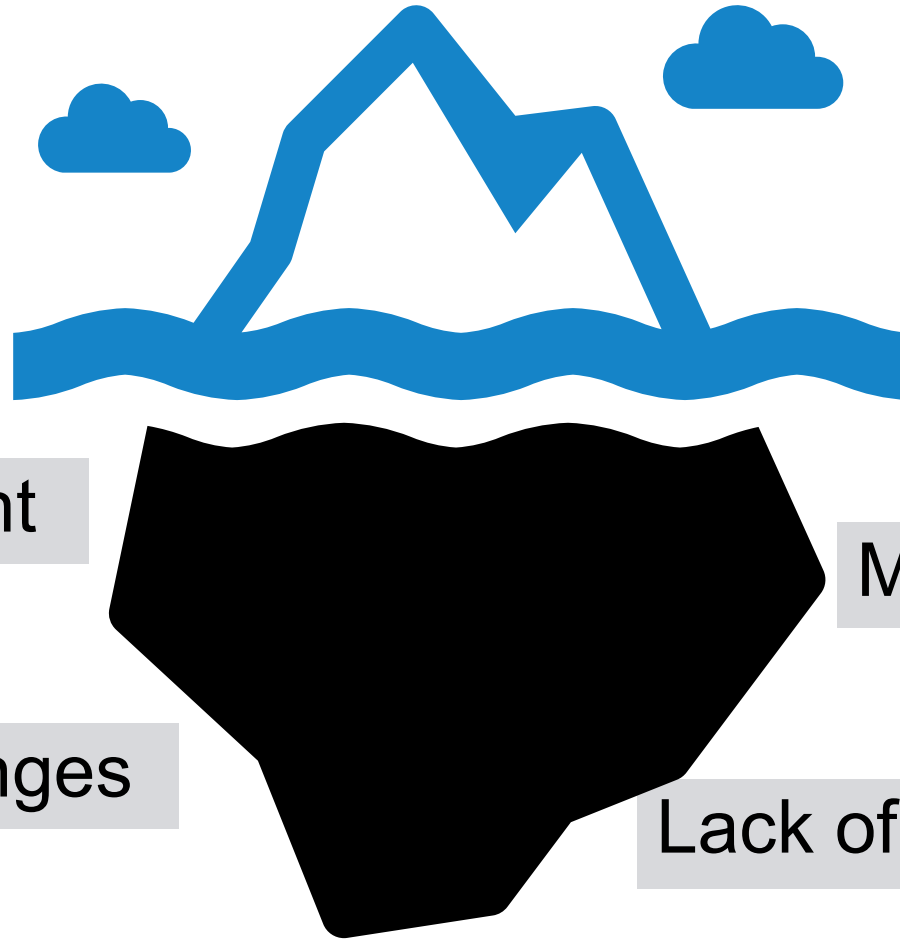


Rituals



Experiences of Families

Struggles



Guilt, relief, resentment

Misaligned expectations

Shock at changes

Lack of information/education

Unheard/excluded from care

Strategies

Preparing expectations



Family councils



Self-care

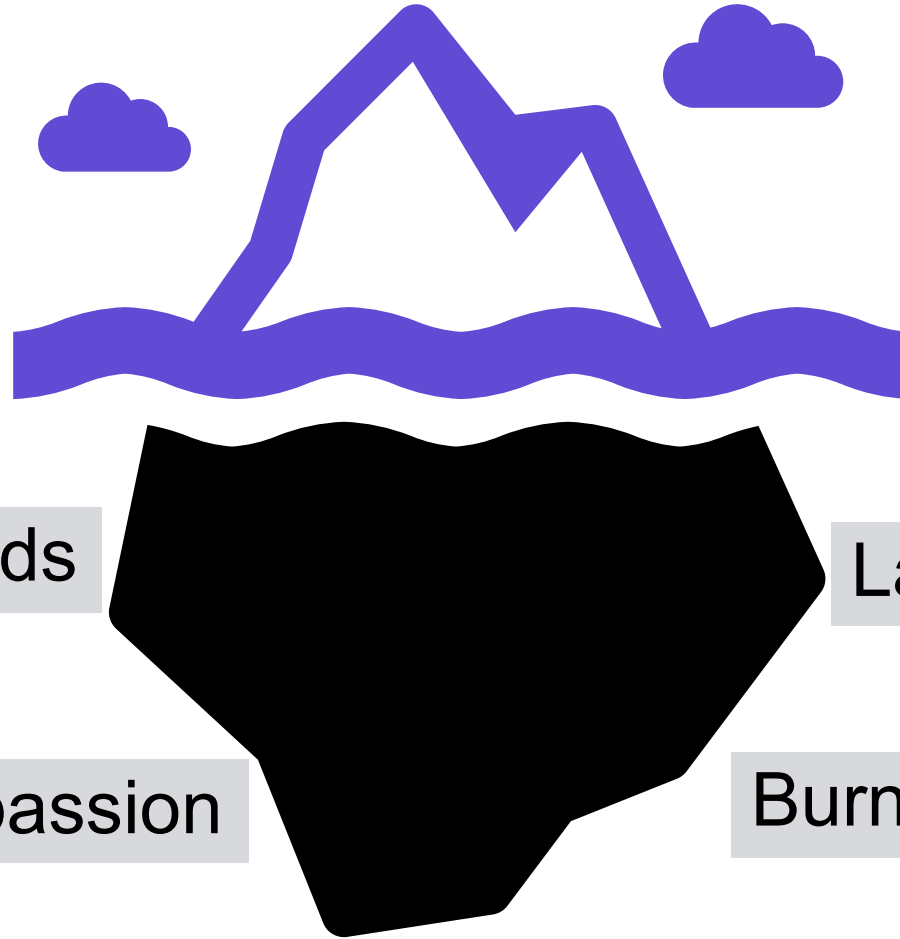


Community support



Experiences of Staff

Struggles



Lack of training, standards

Lack of grief support

Professionalism vs compassion

Burnout

Pressure to admit new residents after death

Strategies

Normalize
conversations
about grief



Clear organizational
processes

Formal grief support

What grief support will the organization
provide to employees?



Trauma-informed care,
self-care, rituals

How investing time for grief care supports the LTC village

[Linzer et al., 2025](#) – Processing grief through art with older adults



[Schulz et al., 2016](#) – Supporting staff in coping with grief and loss in dementia care



[Hawes et al., 2024](#) – Study of organizational grief support and burnout among nursing home staff



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It [end-of-life conversations] are so often avoided, but so necessary to to have over a period of time, because... touch points about this topic of end of life, help us not only grieve along the process, which is helpful... [but also] understand the process, which is really important, and understand what our options are along the way.

- Focus Group with People with Lived Experience,
Long-Term Care Collaborative

BC Resources for LTC Village

- [Canadian Virtual Hospice Grief Resources](#): modules and resources designed to help understand and move through grief.
- [As Death Approaches](#) (Vancouver Island Health): overview of common changes
- ['Taking Care of Me'](#) from the Care for Caregivers
- [BC Bereavement Helpline Grief & Loss Support Brochures](#) – available to order in various languages. Trained volunteers provide emotional support and can refer people to grief and bereavement services near them.
- [Local Hospice Societies](#) also play an essential role in supporting people through grief and bereavement. They typically offer a range of services including 1:1 grief support, support groups, and anticipatory grief resources. Find your local hospice society [here](#).
- [S.U.C.C.E.S.S](#) to access grief support in **languages other than English**.
- [KUU-US Crisis Line](#) to access grief support **for Indigenous people**.
- [Palliative Essentials in Long-Term Care Course](#): self-paced course designed to help LTC clinicians integrate a palliative approach into everyday care.

BC Resources for LTC Village

- **Family Caregivers of British Columbia**: Provides province-wide peer support groups, educational webinars, and one-on-one coaching for family caregivers.
- **Vancouver Coastal Association of Family Councils (VCAFC)**: Help families in their long-term care journey learn about the value of taking part in their loved one's advocacy for quality of life through the family and resident council community within their care home. The Education Portal provides caregiver tips.
- **Alzheimer Society of Canada Long-Term Care Guide**: Offers a compassionate framework for caregivers moving a loved one into care, helping them balance care recipient needs with their own well-being.
- **"Now What? Managing the Emotional Journey of Long-Term Care for Families" by Deborah Bakti**: An essential book written by a former senior care operations leader and family member. It breaks down the complex feelings of guilt and relief while offering practical advice for connecting with care staff .
- **"Recipe for Empathy" By Deborah Bakti**: RECIPE for Empathy lays out six steps to develop new ways of thinking, communicating and connecting with residents and their families by design, not default.
- **BC Care Providers LTC Grief and Loss Resource Sheet** : resources staff can use themselves or refer family members to for grief support

What Helps: Interpersonal Strategies that Honour Grief in LTC

- Staging or easing the transition to LTC via respite stays or downsizing
- Preparing expectations and supporting shared decision-making
- Resident peer support, reminiscence therapy
- Trauma-informed care
- Honouring cultural diversity in loss and grief
- Engaging family council as partners in improving grief-aware practices
- Ensuring the person dying is not alone
- Notifying the entire village of LTC about the resident's death

What Helps: Organizational Strategies that Honour Grief in LTC

- Move-in staff and family huddle
- Family council participation - creating outlets for people to process grief through engagement
- Rituals to let others know the resident is transition to bedside end of life care
- Room blessing/memorials to acknowledge grief of entire LTC village
- Organizational processes for grief and nearing death are clear (i.e. handbook)
- Make formal grief support available

Summary

Explored experiences of grief among residents, families, and staff



Identified strategies to support grieving among all members of the LTC village

Presented BC-based grief and bereavement resources



Grief is not a problem to fix in long-term care.
It is a reality we can help acknowledge and normalize to honour
the experiences that come with living, caring, and working in
the LTC village.



Q&A