

# Walking Through Grief ...

On 16 June, Director of the Australian Centre for Grief & Bereavement, Chris Hall, was Guest Speaker at MHACA's community forum, 'Walking Through Grief. Attended by about 60 people, Chris provided an overview of contemporary understandings of grief and bereavement. An engaging and passionate speaker, Chris brought refreshing insights into this at times painful and difficult topic, his presentation interspersed with rich quotes and complementary humour. While in Alice Springs Chris also ran two workshops, one on 'Supporting Young People Experiencing Grief & Loss' and one on 'Relearning the Self and the World in the Wake of Loss.' Both were greatly appreciated by all who attended. Rita Riedel reports ...



Chris Hall providing rich information at one of several workshops on grief and loss

## Relearning the Self & the World in the Wake of Loss

IN HIS forum and workshops Chris shared some of the latest insights into grief and bereavement. A significant message was that while death ends a life it doesn't end a relationship. Healthy grieving is not about 'letting go and moving on' but about having an 'ongoing conversation' and maintaining healthy symbolic bonds with the person who had died.

Some of the key shifts in understanding that Chris highlighted include:

- ◆ Grieving is not a fixed linear pathway but a complex evolving process of adapting to loss.
- ◆ Our external world changes and so too does our deep inner identity. Be aware of deep revision that takes place.
- ◆ While loss is painful it also offers gifts and opportunities. Our growth is enhanced through reconstructing new meaning of our lives.

◆ Grieving is multi-faceted and involves not only the emotions but also cognitive processes. Some people grieve more intuitively (emotive, affective, social and seeking support) while others are more instrumental (active, cognitive, solitary and focus on problem solving).

◆ In healthy grieving we move from a passive contractive role to one of active expansive growth. Grieving is not about 'containing' but about 'transforming', not about getting closure but an ongoing journey of transformation.

## Understanding the story ...

Where there is love there is the potential for loss and grief. Love and loss go hand in hand. Where there is no attachment—no love—there is no sense of grieving.

We can't help the bereaved person until we know the deceased and there relationship to this person: Who were they? What was the nature of the attachment (good/difficult)? How did they die? What history has gone before? We also need to consider people's different personalities, attachment styles (formed in childhood), beliefs and values, current stresses, social supports and spiritual resources. When someone we

## Grieving styles ...

People grieve in different ways, some through crying, some through being in nature, some through doing, building or fixing things, others through small rituals. If people are managing well then there is no need for therapy. Those that benefit most are those at high risk.

Some people are 'addicted to grief' as a way of holding onto the person, a way of filling the void and emptiness they feel from not grieving in a healthy way. How well we move through grief is influenced by the attachment styles we developed in childhood, and understanding these helps people to heal and grow.

## We are meaning-making beings ...

Our beliefs are the building blocks of our lives. Humans are naturally meaning-making beings—we impose order and structure on even seemingly random events. Reality is not 'fixed' but relative to our own interpretation.

The three facets of meaning-making are: 1) sense-making 2) benefit-finding, and 3) identity reconstruction. In healthy grieving we find or create new meaning in our life as well as in the death of our loved one: we 'relearn the self,' as well as 'relearn the world.' We also seek strands of continuity in the relationship as well as points of transition.



Left: Participants at Chris Hall's workshop on 17 June

## What helps?

A range of things have proved helpful for different people and include:

◆ **Ritualisation** – involves symbolic acts that offer sacred meaning which reaffirm our relationship to that which we've lost. Rituals also provide an ongoing sense of connection and can generate social support. Rituals relate to:

- Continuity
- Transition
- Reconciliation
- Affirmation

◆ **Drawing & painting** – or other forms of artistic expression – can articulate the losses and possibilities for the future, and can provide a bridge into feelings and issues that are difficult to speak of

◆ **Letters to the lost** – speaking deeply from the heart about what is important in the relationship; addressing the words that remain unspoken and questions that remain unasked.

◆ **Journaling** – writing about any aspects of the relationship or loss, talking about events and reactions to them, abandoning all concern with grammar, spelling and neatness.

Other supports include -

- ◆ Online support
- ◆ Personal pilgrimage
- ◆ Photo gallery
- ◆ Reflective reading

## Healing in community ...

While grieving commonly takes place in private, significant healing also occurs in the public social sphere of community. Shared rituals allow us to express our collective grief and help to build a sense of connection and of being understood. Joining in with others helps us to re-integrate back into the world.

We are forever changed by death and loss, changes which can help us to more deeply appreciate and embrace life. ✕

For more information on the work of ACGB visit [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au).



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*At depressionNet we believe supporting people impacted by depression necessitates a wide array of services, based on offering each client complementary options to meet their specific requirements.*

## [www.depressionServices.org.au](http://www.depressionServices.org.au)

- ★ Individual Counselling using online technologies
- ★ Peer Support
- ★ Specific information & resources regarding depression

The **Counselling Service** at depressionServices is based on providing clients with one-to-one sessions to improve their mental health. We offer an initial eight individual sessions with one of our friendly Counsellors, and treatment includes access to extensive resources to empower clients to take control of their own wellbeing.

**Peer Support** operates at depressionServices through services tailored to both living well and working well with depression. The Services are facilitated by our dedicated volunteers, and use a variety of online technologies to provide clients with a safe and supportive environment to share experiences and help each other along their journeys with depression.

The **Information & Resources** available through depression Services are provided for people impacted by depression to assist them in understanding their depression, and also in finding the treatment options and other professional supports which most suit their needs.

We believe that it is important to be equipped with a variety of resources and we hope that knowing about depressionServices gives you and your clients another resource option. In all our services we pride ourselves on our adherence to industry standards, certifications and frameworks to meet our duty of care to all our clients.

*Warm Regards*  
**Terry Houguet-Pincham**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

