

GRIEF

IN THE ROOM

KEY INSIGHTS ON: BEREAVEMENT BY DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

Bereavement by drugs/alcohol results in a unique type of grief, especially if the death was sudden, traumatic and shocking. The ripple effect of that can carry far and wide into the bereaved person's world, and may result in grief that can be complex and long-lasting. We discuss this topic in Episode 03 of the podcast Grief In The Room; here are the important takeaways from that episode.

Unique Factors

- Death in the public eye, media intrusion, a public inquiry, community gossip and misinformation
- Death may have been anticipated if there is history of substance misuse, causing anticipatory grief
- Nature of death is often sudden, shocking and traumatic, especially if circumstances are witnessed
- A stigmatised death, with judgment from outsiders, leading to disenfranchised grief and lack of support

Impact On the Bereaved

- Loneliness and isolation. No one 'gets it'
- Shame, guilt, anger, blame, sense of betrayal; both at self, the deceased, and those around you
- Unfinished business, unanswered questions
- Damage to family dynamics and relationships, which may predate the death by many years
- Shattering of sense of self, safety, and world view



When Supporting These Clients:

- Expect the unexpected. This is true for all grief, but especially so for traumatic loss or stigmatised deaths like suicide or drugs/alcohol deaths.
- Embody the core conditions. Your client may be on the receiving end of judgment from professionals and those around them, and may be carrying much shame & guilt. It can take more time than you expect to build up therapeutic trust and an empathic connection. Stay alert to your own assumptions and prejudices.
- Use the deceased person's name. However they lived, however they died, they were a human being, and deserve to be remembered as such.
- Mirror language around substance use. Some people find words like addict stigmatising.

