

Navigating Grief: Strategies for Service Providers After Client Loss



July 23, 2026

OneOp.org/learn/160140/



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A DOW & Cooperative Extension partnership supporting professionals who serve military families.

Our Mission

Strengthening military family service providers through accessible, research-informed learning.

What We Offer

Free, online professional development through webinars, podcasts, courses, and more.



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Learning Objectives

Webinar Overview

This webinar offers practical, evidence-informed strategies for coping with client loss — emotionally, spiritually, and within the scope of professional practice.

①

Apply evidence-informed strategies for coping with grief after client loss in military-connected care settings.

②

Describe key components of post-crisis growth and how they relate to professional healing and integration.

③

Identify supportive practices such as supervision, peer consultation, and organizational resources that promote recovery.

④

Demonstrate awareness of ethical boundaries and self-care principles when navigating personal grief within professional roles.

Today's Presenter

Dr. Nici Richardson McFarland

*Licensed Professional Counselor-Supervisor,
Board Certified Chaplain, and Board-
Certified Telemental Health Provider*
Crown of Hope Counseling

About Me

Dr. Richardson McFarland specializes in grief and loss, trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, chronic illness, stress management, and spiritual distress.





Brief Recap of Part 1



**Naming grief,
acknowledging loss**

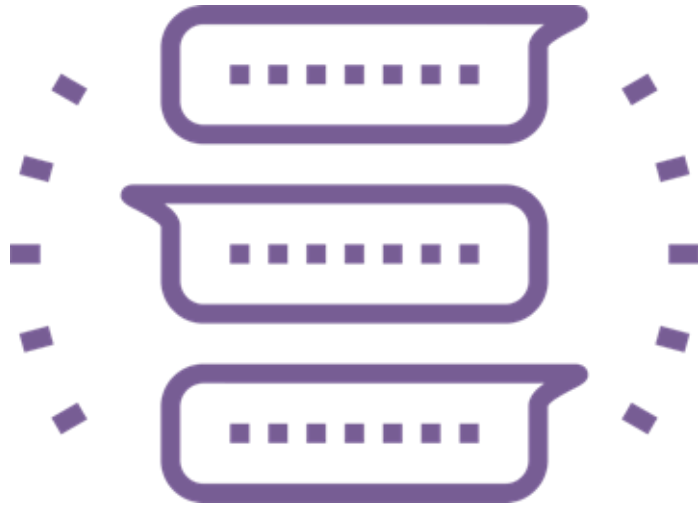
On-Demand
***Coping with Client Loss: Professional
Approaches for Service Providers***
OneOp.org/learn/160139/



Welcome & Grounding

Navigating Grief: Healing & Integration

“Take a moment to notice one thing in your environment that feels steady.”



Share your answers with us in the
chat pod & remember to select
"everyone!"

Invitation

*What are you carrying
forward — and what are
you ready to release?*

Why This Matters

- Grief is not weakness — it's a witness to love.
- Unprocessed grief affects care, clarity, and connection.
- Unaddressed grief contributes to emotional exhaustion and decreased empathy (Figley, 2002).

How: Normalize grief as part of professional identity.



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Understanding Grief & Mourning

- **Grief:** internal experience of loss.
- **Mourning:** outward expression of grief.
- Professionals have the right to mourn — even when grief is disenfranchised.
- Disenfranchised grief occurs when loss isn't publicly acknowledged (Doka,1989).

How: Create micro-rituals (moment of pause, shared acknowledgment).

Understanding Grief Responses

- **Emotional:** sadness, guilt, anger, numbness
- **Physical:** fatigue, tension, sleep disruption
- **Cognitive:** intrusive thoughts, rumination, self-doubt
- **Spiritual:** questioning meaning, dissonance, searching
- **Professional:** hyper-responsibility, over-functioning, withdrawal

Tonkin's Model of Grief

- Grief doesn't shrink; life grows around it.
- **Visual:** expanding circles around a constant center of grief.
- Growth occurs as life expands, not as grief disappears (Tonkin, 1996).

How: Encourage reflection — “What helps me live around my grief?”

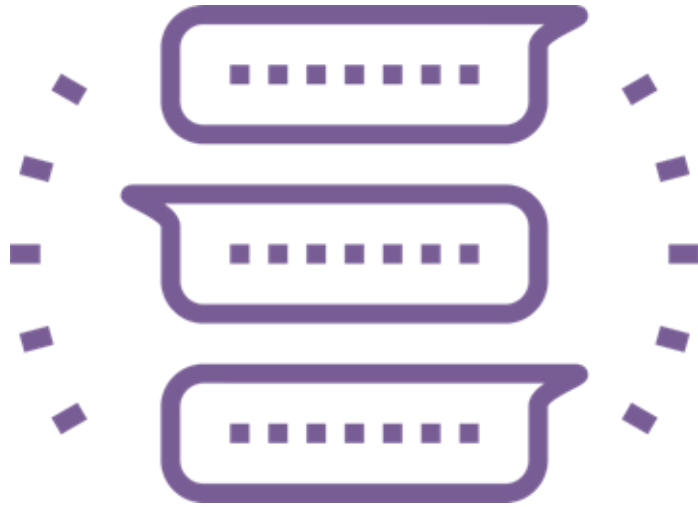


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Personal Barriers to Coping with Loss

These often stem from internal experiences, beliefs, or emotional wounds:

- **Unacknowledged grief:** “I didn’t realize how much this loss affected me.”
- **Guilt or self-blame:** “Could I have done more?”
- **Fear of vulnerability:** “If I show emotion, will I seem unprofessional?”
- **Spiritual dissonance:** “Where was God in this?”
- **Past unresolved losses resurfacing**
- **Isolation:** “No one else seems to be grieving — maybe I shouldn’t be.”



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chat pod & remember to select
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Personal Barriers Reflection

*Which of these feel
familiar to me?*

Professional Barriers to Coping with Loss

These arise from role expectations, organizational culture, or systemic gaps:

- **Lack of postvention protocols**
- **Cultural silence:** “We don’t talk about grief here.”
- **Boundary confusion:** “Was I too close? Not close enough?”
- **Fear of judgment from colleagues**
- **Time pressure:** “I had to move on immediately.”
- **Ethical tension:** “I’m grieving, but I still have to perform.”

When Unprofessional Grief Goes Unseen

- Many providers carry grief from past client losses that was never acknowledged.
- Unmourned grief often resurfaces during stress, transitions, or new client crises.
- Compassion fatigue can mask unresolved grief (Figley, 2002).
- Professional grief is often disenfranchised and unspoken (Doka, 2017).

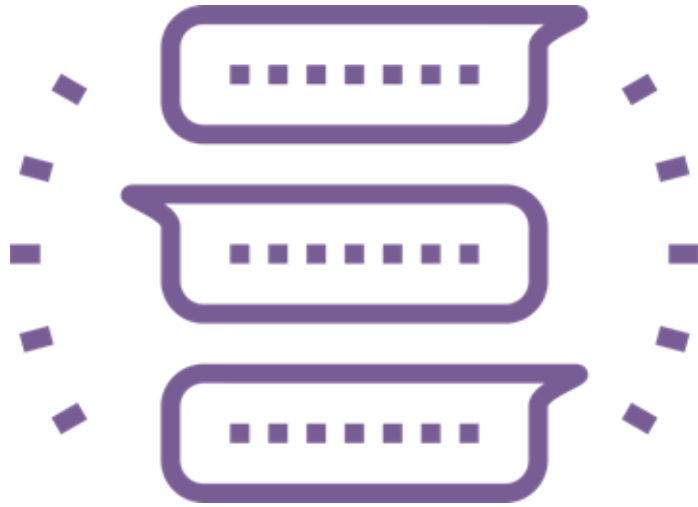
Key idea: “If your grief is showing up now, it’s not late — it’s ready.”

When Burnout is Actually Grief

- Emotional numbing or detachment
- Irritability, cynicism, or compassion fatigue
- Hyper-responsibility (“I must save everyone”)
- Avoidance of certain client presentations
- Feeling spiritually disconnected or “flat”
- Burnout symptoms that don’t resolve with rest



Anna Tarazevich / Pexels



Share your answers with us in the
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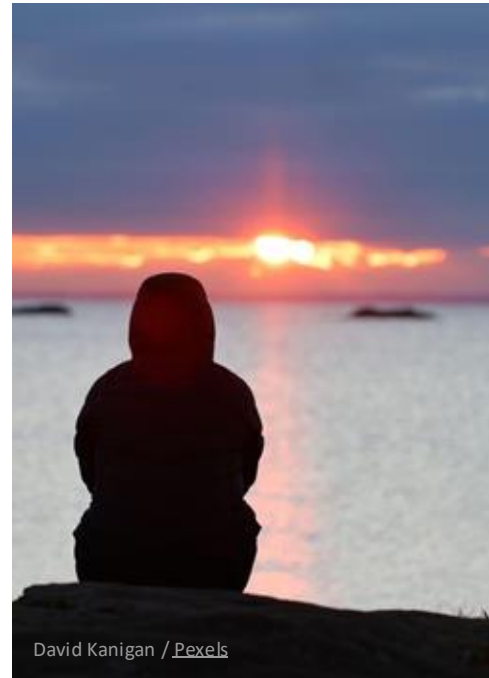
Burnout Reflection

*Which of these feel
familiar in my work?*

Grief Doesn't Expire – It Waits

- Grief remains until it is witnessed and honored.
- Mourning can begin months or years after a loss.
- Your client's impact deserves space — even now.
- Wolfelt: "You don't move *on* — you move *forward with*."

Key idea: Mourning integrates grief rather than avoiding it.



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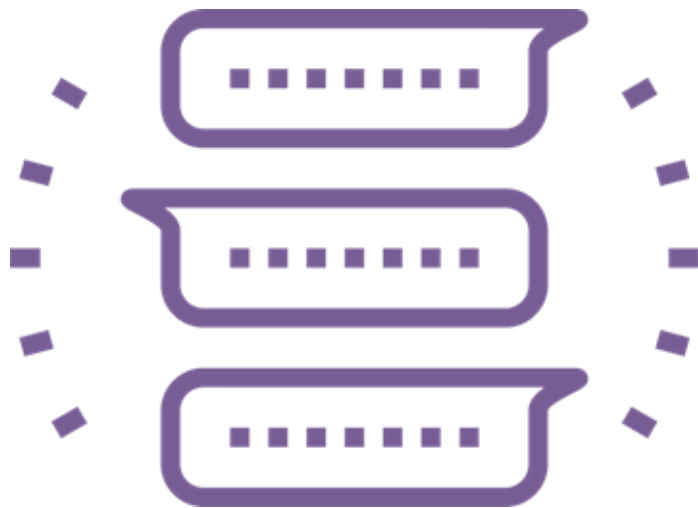
Knowing When You Need Help Too

- Persistent guilt or rumination
- Emotional flooding or shutdown around similar clients
- Difficulty accessing empathy
- Avoiding supervision or consultation
- Feeling alone in your grief

Key idea: Counseling is professional maintenance, not failure.

Integrating the Meaning of the Loss

- **Narrative therapy:** Externalize the grief story; honor the client's meaning.
- **Existential therapy:** Explore identity shifts, purpose, responsibility.
- **Meaning-centered coping** (Park, 2010): Reconstruct meaning after loss.
- **Continuing bonds theory:** Maintain symbolic connection without dysfunction.



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Meaning in Loss Reflection

What did this client teach me?

What part of their story lives on in my work?

Carrying the Bond With You

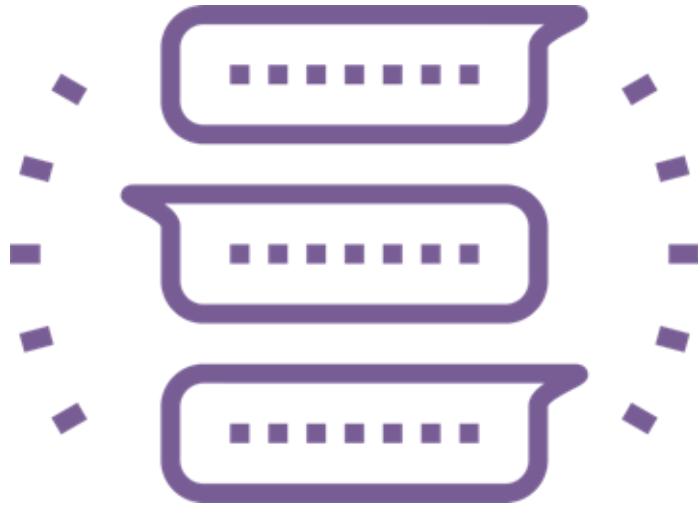
- Moving *on* implies erasure; moving *forward* honors the bond.
- Identify one practice that keeps the client's impact alive.
- Name the value or insight they gave you.
- Allow grief to become part of your professional wisdom.

Key idea: “Your grief is not a liability — it is part of your compassion.”

Why Coping Matters

- Grief impacts clarity, empathy, and decision-making.
- Unprocessed grief increases emotional exhaustion (Figley, 2002).
- Professional grief often goes unacknowledged (Doka, 2017).
- Coping is not indulgence – it's ethical stewardship.

Key idea: “When grief is named, empathy is restored.”



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chat pod & remember to select
"everyone!"

Collective Practice Reflection

*Name one emotion you've
carried since the loss.*

Resilience & Grief

- Resilience and grief are companions, not opposites.
- Connection, meaning, flexibility, hope (Southwick & Charney, 2012)

How: Identify resilience practices that coexist with grief — supervision, peer support, spiritual grounding.



Post-Crisis Growth

- **Growth domains** — relational depth, spiritual awareness, professional clarity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)
- Growth doesn't erase grief — it honors it.

How: Use reflection and supervision to integrate lessons from loss.

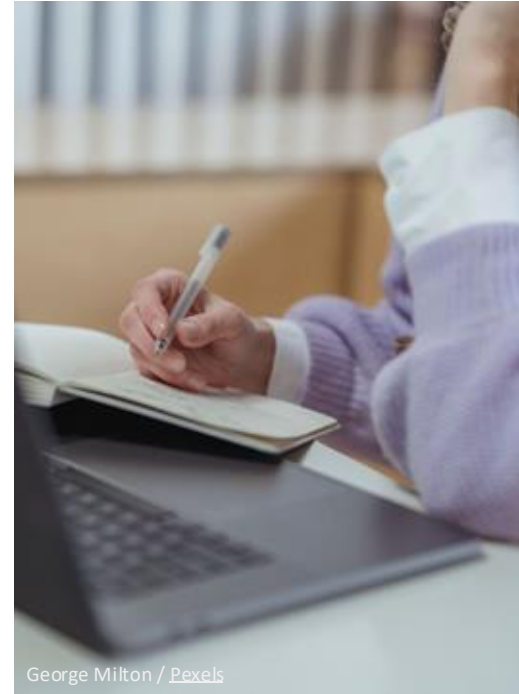


Coping Strategies: Internal

**Journaling, mindfulness, prayer,
self-compassion:**

- Expressive writing reduces rumination and improves regulation (Pennebaker, 1997).
- Self-compassion fosters emotional balance (Neff, 2003).

How: Schedule brief reflective practices between sessions.



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Coping Strategies: Relational & Structural

- Peer support, supervision, consultation
- EAP, time off, grief-informed policies

How: Build a “support map” — who you consult, where you rest, how you reset.

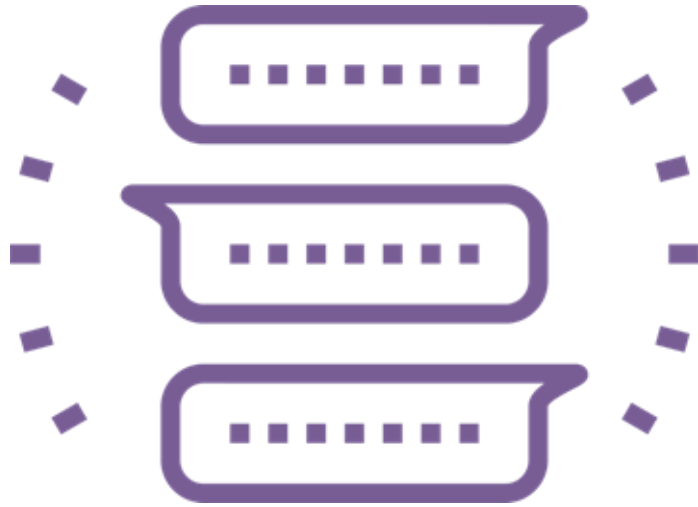


Case Vignette:

Client Death by Suicide

- Clinician loses long-term client; no formal support
- Experiences guilt, isolation, spiritual dissonance
- Compassion fatigue risk (Figley, 2002)

How: Identify coping strategies, ethical boundaries, postvention practices.



Share your answers with us in the
chat pod & remember to select
"everyone!"

Case Vignette Reflection

*How can supervision serve
as sacred space for healing?*

Ethical Boundaries & Self-Care

- ACA A.4.b **Personal Values** — avoid value imposition
- ACA C.2.a **Boundaries of Competence** — seek supervision when uncertain
- Texas TAC §681.41 **Professional Conduct** — maintain boundaries, protect welfare

How: Pause when empathy feels heavy; model healthy grief for peers.

Organizational Support & Advocacy

- **What helps:** Rituals, acknowledgment, postvention protocols
- **What harms:** Silence, blame, minimization
- Postvention improves team cohesion and retention (Jordan & McIntosh, 2011).

How: Advocate for grief-informed culture — start with naming what's missing.

Reflection & Integration

Journaling prompts:

- “What has helped me heal?”
- “What do I still need?”
- “What might I offer others?”

How: Use these prompts in supervision or peer consultation.



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Closing Blessing & Invitation

You've shown up for this work with courage and care.

May your grief be honored, your healing be steady, and your growth be rooted in grace.

We invite you to continue this journey — not alone, but supported, equipped, and seen.

Additional Resources

Peer Support & Professional Networks

- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS)
<https://www.cstsonline.org/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) <https://www.nctsn.org/>
- PsychArmor Institute <https://psycharmor.org/>
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) <https://www.taps.org/>

Additional Resources

Grief-Informed Organizational Tools

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS) <https://suicidology.org/community-support-resources/suicide-loss-survivors/>
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) <https://www.theiacp.org/>
- National Center for PTSD <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Practitioner Guides <https://www.samhsa.gov/libraries/evidence-based-practices-resource-center>

Additional Resources

General Grief & Loss Resources

- American Psychological Association (APA), Grief & Bereavement Resources
<https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>
- Center for Loss & Life Transition, Dr. Alan Wolfelt
<https://www.centerforloss.com/>
- Dougy Center <https://www.dougy.org/>
- Grief (Because Grief Never Dies), David Kessler <https://grief.com/>
- National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) <https://nacg.org/>

Additional Resources

Provider Self-Care & Resilience Tools

- APA, *Addressing compassion fatigue* (Article)
<https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines>
- CSTS, Provider Resilience (App) <https://mobile.health.mil/Apps/Native-Apps/Provider-Resilience>
- National Center for PTSD, Provider Well-being Toolkit
<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/consult/resources.asp>
- SAMHSA, *Self-Care for the Behavioral Health Workforce* (Fact Sheet)
<https://www.aaap.org/samhsa-releases-behavioral-health-workforce-self-care-fact-sheet/>

Additional Resources

Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Prevention

- Figley Institute Resources <http://www.figleyinstitute.com/>
- National Academy of Medicine, Action Collaborative on Clinician Well-Being and Resilience <https://nam.edu/our-work/programs/clinician-resilience-and-well-being/>

Additional Resources, Books

Grief, Meaning-Making & Professional Healing

- *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* by Dr. Thomas Attig
- *Grief Is a Journey* and *Disenfranchised Grief* by Dr. Kenneth Doka
- *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* and *The Needs of the Dying* by David Kessler
- *Techniques of Grief Therapy* by Dr. Robert Neimeyer
- *Companioning the Bereaved; Understanding Your Grief; and The Journey Through Grief* by Dr. Alan Wolfelt

Additional Resources, Books

Additional Evidence-Informed Texts

- *The Posttraumatic Growth Handbook* by Lawrence Calhoun & Richard Tedeschi
- *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* by Dennis Charney and Steven Southwick
- *Writing to Heal* by James Pennebaker

Children's Grief Literature

- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst

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Access the Resources



Additional Resources

- Scan the QR code to access all webinar resources, including tools, links, and more
- Use these resources to support continued learning and practical application in your work

[OneOp.org/webinar_resource/
navigating-grief-after-client-loss/](https://OneOp.org/webinar_resource/navigating-grief-after-client-loss/)



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Personal, Professional, and Spiritual Dimensions of Grief

Part 1 explore how organizational culture, role expectations, and systemic pressures shape the experience of loss.



Coping with Client Loss: Professional Approaches for Service Providers

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August 26, 2026 | Building Strong
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