

Learning Disabilities Bereavement Webinar

3rd November 2025

This webinar will begin shortly



Welcome

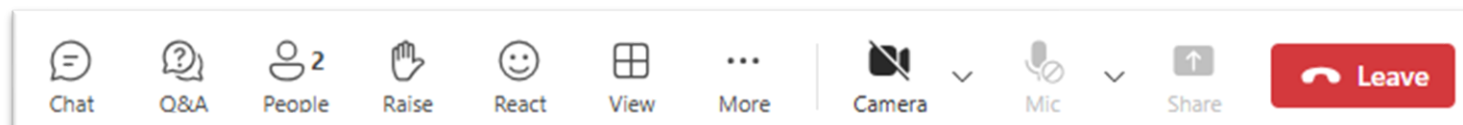
HCPA Host: Peter Woolnough





Webinar Housekeeping

- This webinar is being recorded and may be used to create a video resource for our website.
- We have switched off your microphones. Please use the Q&A box to ask a question and we will switch your microphones on at appropriate times if we need you to elaborate. You will also need to unmute yourself once enabled.
- We have enabled your cameras. If you do not wish to feature in the recording, please leave your camera off.
- You will be issued a CPD Certificate for attendance at this event. Certificates will be uploaded to your Care Professional Academy.





13:30 – Introductions and house keeping

What is loss?

Emotional Impact and how people express grief

Communication Challenges and Behavioural indicators

The Importance of predictability, safety and emotional expression

Staff reflection: being present, Not Fixing, But supporting

Physical Memory Aids (Photos, benches) to help with grief

Learning from Palliative Care Practices

Break

Consistency in Team responses to emotional needs

Cultural sensitivity and recognising different grieving practices

Leadership's role in managing difficult conversations and transitions

Key take-aways

Event closes



Agenda

Loss and Bereavement for people with learning disabilities

Community Learning Disability Nursing Service



What is loss?

loss *noun* - (NOT HAVING)

the action or state of not having or keeping something anymore:

Loss may mean death:

loss *noun* (NOT CONTROLLING)

the action or state of not maintaining or having control over something anymore:



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5 min task;

Use the Slido Poll function (or the chat if you can't see the link) to describe the kind of losses that people with learning disabilities may have in their lives?



Types of loss

- Family relationships
- Staff members moving on
- Death of person close to you
- Death of a pet
- Friendships
- Control over choices in your life
- Your health
- Awareness of being different
- Routine or role



How could these losses affect people?

- Expression of various emotions –may be in a muddled way
- Physical changes
- Self harm
- Mental health changes
- Losing interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Addictions



Communication challenges

Many people with learning disabilities express grief non-verbally

Communication breakdowns can mask distress

Fear when abstract phrases are used

Use direct, honest, and clear language to build trust



Communication challenges



Behaviour | Possible
Meaning



Withdrawal |
Sadness or shock



Anger/Anxiety | Fear
or insecurity



Regression | Seeking
safety



Laughter | Masking
distress



Repetition | Needing
reassurance



look beyond the
surface to find
meaning



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How to enable positive communication

Use visuals,
symbols, or
social stories

Allow time and
silence

Keep language
simple and
honest

Maintain
routines and
trusted staff

Encourage
creative
expression

Compassionate
Accessible
communication



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The importance of predictability and safety for emotional expression

Predictability can have a powerful impact on emotional wellbeing, and we often feel safer when we have a sense of routine. For children and adults with severe and profound intellectual disability, having a sense of predictability and consistency can help to increase feelings of safety and security. Consistent, repeated routines can provide a sense of order and familiarity to the day and therefore create a sense of expectancy. Habitual behaviours and routines can act as cues for our body and mind to be able to predict and prepare for what is happening next. This can reduce stress, be reassuring and calming.

[ARTICLE: Predictability for Reducing Anxiety and Promoting Wellbeing - NAC Wellbeing](#)

HPFT have many useful resources for you to print off and use [Useful Resources](#)



Visual Timetable

A visual timetable shows the user what they are doing throughout the day or week in a simple way using pictures.

Key Points

- Shows what person is doing on a day/week
- Easier for person to process visual information
- Provide structure, routine and improve understanding
- Avoid frustration and anxiety
- Encourage independence and build confidence
- Opportunity to interact with people to ask questions and plan choices



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Being with someone, not fixing but supporting



This video helps explain how you can acknowledge someone else's pain.

- Be aware of the messages you are giving someone through your words and actions
- Support the person to have some time away from others to feel the emotions



Physical tools that can help grieving

- Using social stories to help the person to make sense of what is happening
- Using easy read materials that encourage a conversation and help you get insight
- Having physical reminders that the person can touch/go to/ask for to show you they are thinking of that event
- Make a Memory box of things related to that person/event/memory
- Use art to create collages/pictures/objects that help to process the feelings
- Physical objects to remember the person
- Giving a chance for people to have a memento to remember that person by
- Leaving the persons belongings in their room, door open and encouraging people to go in



Learning from Palliative Care colleagues

Palliative Care for people with Learning Disabilities has resources such as webinars and links to research projects

[PCPLD](#)

Marie Curie have developed resources that are helpful

[Marie Curie Resources](#)

Kingston University has produced an End-of-Life Toolkit to help people with learning disabilities

[Victoria and Stuart Project](#)

Mencap have developed some resources that can be used with people with learning disabilities here;

[Coping with the loss of a loved one](#)

MacIntyre have developed an eLearning workbook for staff;

[Wellbeing for Life - Loss, Change, Grief Workbook](#)



Comfort Break



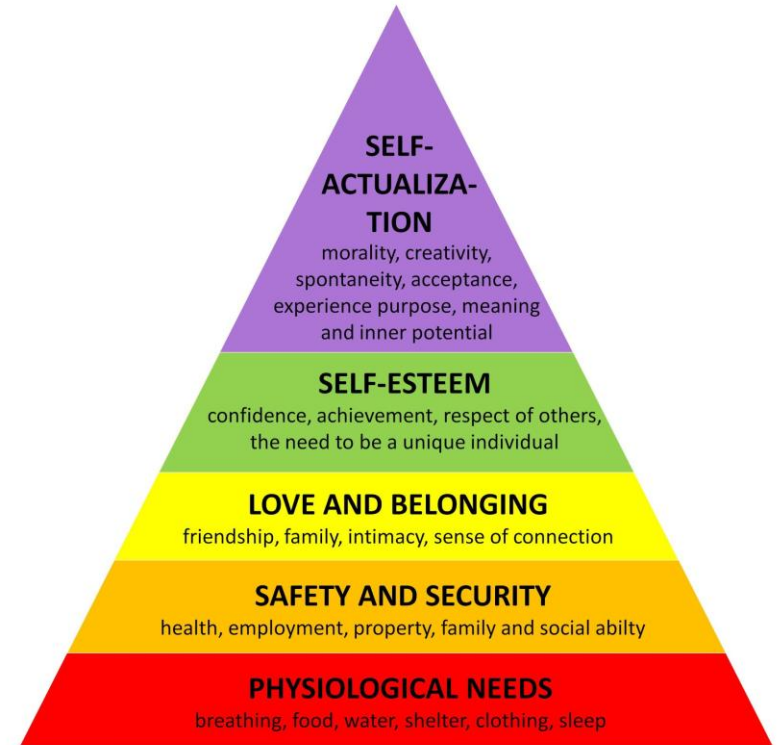
Consistency in responding to the people you support

We all need consistency from the people in our lives to feel;

- Safe
- Understand what's expected of us
- Feel calm and in control

As a team you need to have a consistent approach to the people you support by;

- Seeking support from health professionals
- MDT approach agreeing the right approach for that individual
- Everybody giving the same message regardless of their own opinion



Cultural sensitivity and different grieving practices

“Care for patients in the end-of-life context is a complex challenge, as care is affected by cultural differences between patients, families, and healthcare workers. In some cultures, religious faith plays a central role in accepting death, offering a framework that gives meaning to loss and alleviates the fear of the unknown. Yet, in others, death can be taboo, a topic to be avoided at all costs, as openly talking about it can be connected to the possibilities of patients’ improvement”. [Managing cultural diversity in end-of-life care: a qualitative study – PMC](#)

So, it's important to understand and discuss;

- cultural influences for the support staff in your team
- how these may affect the workers ability to support another person’s grief and loss
- how these may affect the practices around supporting someone before, during and after they die
- the emotional impact of this and the strategies that would help



Useful Resources

["What If" document](#)

[Supporting people with LD with loss and bereavement NHS Wales](#)

[Marie Curie Booklets and resources](#)

[Bing Videos](#) –PCPLD End of Life care planning for people with learning disabilities

New End of Life Guide pages for Care Providers will be on the HCPA website in the new year



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01707 708108 / assistance@hcpa.co.uk (Mon to Fri - 9am to 5pm). www.hcpa.info/hub

HCPA: 'Sharing best practice in care through partnership'



Feedback

What do you want out of future webinars?

