



## EXPERT PANELISTS

**Patti Anewalt, PhD, LPC, FT**, is the Director of Pathways Center for Grief & Loss with Hospice & Community Care, serving Lancaster, York and surrounding counties in Pennsylvania. She is a member of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement and a fellow in thanatology with the Association for Death Education and Counseling. Dr. Anewalt is a disaster mental health specialist for the American Red Cross and serves on several community crisis teams, providing trainings, debriefings, and support. She is a contributing author to HFA's *Journeys* bereavement newsletter. Dr. Anewalt has held key leadership roles with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's bereavement committees, and in that capacity has mentored hospice bereavement professionals throughout the country. She is a frequent presenter at many national hospice conferences.

**Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv**, is Senior Bereavement Consultant to HFA and a Professor of Gerontology at the Graduate School of The College of New Rochelle. He serves as editor of HFA's *Living with Grief®* book series and its *Journeys* bereavement newsletter. He is a prolific author, editor, and lecturer; past president of the Association for Death Education and Counseling and a member and past chair of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement. The Association for Death Education and Counseling presented him with an Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Death Education in 1998. Dr. Doka is an ordained Lutheran minister and a licensed mental health counselor in the state of New York. This is Dr. Doka's 25th year of involvement with the *Living with Grief®* program.

**Richard Tedeschi, PhD**, is a Professor of Psychology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a member of the core faculty for the Health Psychology PhD program at UNC. Dr. Tedeschi serves as a consultant to the American Psychological Association (APA) on trauma and resilience. He is a fellow for the Division of Trauma Psychology at APA and has he has written several books on posttraumatic growth, an area of research he developed. Dr. Tedeschi is past president of the North Carolina Psychological Association. Dr. Tedeschi's specific research interests include posttraumatic growth in survivors of various traumas, including combat, serious illness, bereavement, and natural disaster; grief and loss; and clinical interventions to facilitate posttraumatic growth in trauma survivors.

## MODERATED BY

**Frank Sesno**, *Director*, School of Media and Public Affairs, The George Washington University

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Define *posttraumatic growth* and differentiate it from *resilience*;
- ▶ Identify factors associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth;
- ▶ Discuss five possible and identified areas of growth;
- ▶ Describe ways that support groups can facilitate posttraumatic growth;
- ▶ Describe appropriate interventive strategies that encourage posttraumatic growth;
- ▶ Identify self-help strategies that can assist grieving individuals to grow even as they grieve.

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# SEGMENT HIGHLIGHTS

## SEGMENT 1: UNDERSTANDING GROWTH IN GRIEF

- ▶ We have little choice about loss and the ensuing grief, yet we retain choice on whether we will grow up or down, or grow bitter or better, as a result. Growth is possible throughout the life cycle and in a range of loss situations.
- ▶ For many years, the study of the grieving process has focused on how individuals cope with grief as well as the complications that may arise within the grieving process. While some early theorists and researchers acknowledged the potential of growth in grief, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the individual experiences of bereaved persons, as well as increased interest in their resilience and posttraumatic growth.
- ▶ *Growth* can be defined as any perceptible positive change in the individual who is grieving and can include such things as new spiritual insights; greater appreciation of life and relationships; the development of new skills or knowledge; reordered priorities; enhanced perceptions of self, such as recognition of inner strength; deeper existential awareness; and reformed behaviors or lifestyle. Growth naturally takes place on a continuum. Some individuals may perceive growth as relatively minor while others view the growth attained as being life-transforming. Circumstances of loss, prior coping skills, and other internal and external factors can be conducive to growth, according to current research.
- ▶ Resilient grievers cope well with significant loss. This means that while they experience loss and may grieve deeply, there is little or no disruption of their ability to function. The relationship between resilience and growth is debated. Some see resilience as a key factor in growth. Others see a more complex and curvilinear relationship. Both resilient grievers and grievers who achieve growth can find something positive in a primarily negative experience. In resilient grievers, this occurs quite naturally, but for those who experience growth, positive change emerges from the stress-related struggle. It should be noted that some capacity for resilience is necessary to emerge from such a struggle with a sense of growth rather than despair. One result of growth can be increased resilience as one copes with future loss.

## SEGMENT 2: TRANSFORMING LOSS

- ▶ There are self-help strategies that individuals can use to achieve growth. For example, most faith and philosophical traditions, as well as cultural perspectives, acknowledge that suffering can be a source of growth. Moreover, each individual has external and internal strengths that, once acknowledged, examined, and utilized, can help to surmount and transform loss.
- ▶ Counselors can assist clients achieve growth. There are very many strength-based approaches that can be utilized throughout the life cycle. This process can begin with using a language of survivorship that emphasizes concepts such as challenge, choice, and confidence. Techniques can be used that assist clients to reframe the loss to foster positive narratives by examining both positive and negative adaptations, examining strengths and challenges, and reviewing their grief process as well as, when possible, carefully engaging in benefit-finding.
- ▶ Peer support groups can assist members achieve growth. The way in which bereavement professionals label and organize groups can influence whether a group is growth oriented. Groups can support growth when members consistently assess and share the growths experienced, both individually and collectively, and review strengths. Research has indicated that groups do better when members have transformation, rather than simply coping with loss, as a therapeutic goal. Given the complexity of human nature and family dynamics, the potential for complicated grief and challenges inherent in group facilitation are important. Support group facilitators should have adequate training and ongoing supervision. While transformation can be a goal, we recognize the many valued roles that support groups play in providing ventilation, validation, and coping mechanisms. Research indicates that in helping others, bereaved individuals help themselves as well.
- ▶ Effective grief support that encourages growth and transformation offers grieving individuals a menu of options, including individual and group support, varied group modalities, educational events, grief libraries, and opportunities for ritual.
- ▶ With careful reflection and continued education, counselors and other health and social service professionals can also achieve continued growth in skills, perspectives, and spirituality. Growth can be an alternative to compassion fatigue.

# TIP SHEET

## *Glossary of Terms*

- *Posttraumatic Growth* – a term coined by Lawrence Calhoun, PhD, and Richard Tedeschi, PhD, refers to the phenomenon of positive change that can result from a traumatic encounter.
- *Language of survivorship* – based on the work of social worker John J. Reynolds that emphasizes utilizing positive language rather than reinforcing a sense of victimhood. An example would be renaming a widow and widowers group “Surviving Spouses.”
- *Benefit-finding* – a counseling strategy that seeks to have clients acknowledge positive changes—both tangible and intangible—that emerge even from tragic events. Such a technique should be carefully employed lest it invalidate grief.
- *Narrative approaches* – Counseling approaches that emphasize the ways that a significant loss can disrupt the narrative of one’s life and attempt to reconstruct the client’s story in the face of loss.
- *Strength-based counseling* – Seeks to build on the client’s internal strengths and external sources of support as well as review successful strategies utilized previously in solving problems.
- *Expert companionship* – Calhoun and Tedeschi’s perspective of the counselor’s role in assisting grieving clients in achieving posttraumatic growth.
- *Resilience* – the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. There seems to be a somewhat curvilinear relationship between resilience and posttraumatic growth as some resilience is needed for growth, but a highly resilient person will often respond to loss well, thus limiting the distress that promotes growth.

## *Sander’s Phases of Grief*

- Shock
- Awareness of Loss
- Conservation-Withdrawal
- Turning Point
- Renewal
- Fulfillment

## *Potential Areas of Growth (Calhoun and Tedeschi)*

- Improved relationships with others
- Renewed spirituality and existential awareness
- Growth in character – perceptions of strength
- New life possibilities
- Greater appreciation of life

**Support Groups may offer grievers outlets, education and other opportunities, including:**

- Validation (Lund)
- Ventilation (Lund)
- Respite and support
- Coping techniques (Lund)
- Hope
- The feeling that helping others helps self (Lund)

**Techniques for Enhancing Posttraumatic Growth**

- Language of Survivorship (Reynolds)
- Empowering Language – Challenge, Courage, Confidence (Chappellear)
- Small choices empower bigger ones
- Examination of positive and negative adaptations
- Assist clients in developing a mission
- Reflection “How has this loss changed you?”
- “Can you imagine what your life would be like or what you would have become if this had not happened?”
- “Benefit-finding” in the experience of grief

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