

05

Grief & Resistance

Corresponds to Chapter 7 in the *Palliative Care Is... A collective response to death, dying, and grief in the inner city* Resource Guide.

Purpose of the Discussion

This module creates space to acknowledge the grief and emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual toll that can come from supporting people through illness, decline, and death.

Key Messages

- Grief is a natural response to caring for others.
- Loss and grief are often cumulative in this work.
- Supporting one another is an important part of sustaining this work.

Before You Facilitate

- Recognize that this topic may bring up personal and emotional responses.
- Consider what supports exist within your organization if participants need additional support after the discussion.

During the Discussion

- Create a supportive environment where participants can share experiences if they choose.
- Remind participants that sharing is voluntary.
- Acknowledge that grief can show up in many ways, including sadness, anger, or exhaustion.

Avoid trying to solve or resolve grief during the discussion. The goal is to recognize and normalize these experiences. If participants seem to be struggling with their grief, be sure to connect them with resources to support.

Closing the Conversation

- Thank participants for their openness and willingness to reflect.
- Acknowledge the emotional labour involved in supporting people in these situations.
- Encourage participants to continue supporting one another and making space for grief within their teams.

Discussion Guide

Grief is not yours to carry alone.

Purpose

This discussion guide helps frontline workers reflect on the role of grief in their work—both their own grief and the grief of those they support. It invites honest, non-judgmental conversation about how grief shows up, why it's so complicated in street-based and system-challenging work, and how workers can move from isolation toward collective care.

The guide also explores how resistance (through public mourning, mutual support, and community advocacy) can be part of grieving. Ultimately, this guide is about naming grief not as a weakness or individual failure, but as a natural, valid, and shared response to injustice, love, and loss.

Introduction: Why it Matters

Grief is everywhere in this work. It might look like burnout. Or compassion fatigue. Or numbness. Or rage. Or pushing through without a break.

But rarely is grief named directly. And even more rarely is it understood as a shared response to unjust systems. Instead, it's often treated like an individual problem-with self-care as the only solution.

This chapter asks: What if grief wasn't just something to manage on your own? What if grief (like care) was something we could hold and deal with together?



Case Scenarios:

Alanna's Story

Alanna is 46 and has worked in housing and harm reduction for 8 years. In the last year, she's lost six people she was close to, including a former client who died in hospital without anyone being notified. She's exhausted, distracted, and says she's just "not herself," but when coworkers check in, she says, "It's just what this job is."

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think Alanna is carrying?
- Have you ever felt—or heard someone say—"It's just part of the job"?
- What might Alanna need that she's not getting?

Damon's Story

Damon is a peer support worker who has lost more than 20 people to drug poisoning in two years. He keeps showing up, saying "We don't have time to fall apart." Lately, he's drinking more and missing shifts.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the signs that Damon is grieving?
- Have you felt pressure to "keep going" even when grieving?
- What kind of support might actually reach Damon?

Ryan's Story

Ryan has been working as a support worker at a women's shelter for about a year now. A resident they were close to died suddenly in hospital. Ryan wasn't notified and is haunted by the feeling they didn't do enough. They haven't told their team—they're worried it would make them seem "too attached" or that it is not an appropriate way to respond in their role.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel about Ryan's situation?
- Have you ever been excluded from the grieving process?
- What makes grief harder when it isn't acknowledged?

Mikey's Story

Mikey, 31, lost his street sister to overdose. Since then, he's withdrawn and using more. "Doesn't matter anymore," he says. You're worried, but not sure if or how to bring it up.

Discussion Questions:

- How is Mikey's grief showing up?
- What might be stopping him from naming or expressing it?
- How could you gently open the door to conversation or care?

Understanding Grief in the Work

Grief in this context is cumulative, ongoing, and deeply tied to injustice. It may not look like sadness. It may look like chronic pain, insomnia, overwork, withdrawal, or self-blame.

Discussion Questions:

- What does grief look or feel like for you (or your team)?
- Have you ever realized something you were feeling was actually grief?
- What helps you recognize grief in yourself or others?

When Grief is an Injustice

Most people you lose aren't dying of old age. They're dying because of colonialism, criminalization, racism, poverty, and policy failure. That changes the shape of grief.

Discussion Questions:

- How does grief feel different when a death was preventable?
- What systemic barriers do you see playing into these deaths?

Relational Complexity and Role Blurring

You might be called "staff;' but you're also a friend, advocate, surrogate family, or cultural kin. That makes grief harder to categorize and harder to talk about.

Discussion Questions:

- How do your personal and professional roles get blurred?
- Have you ever wondered if you were "allowed" to grieve someone?
- How do conversations about "boundaries" land with you?

Grief as an Individual Responsibility

Often, workplace culture frames grief as a personal problem with self-care as the only acceptable solution. This leaves workers isolated and unsupported.

Discussion Questions:

- What support (if any) does your workplace offer around grief?
- Have you ever felt blamed or isolated for struggling?
- What kinds of grief support feel real, safe, or meaningful to you?

What Helps: Worker-Informed Grief Practices

Many workers have shared the things that help. Not as fixes, but as ways of surviving grief together.

- Finding Your People: Whether it's a grief group or your roller derby crew, what matters is being with people who get it. Community matters more than format.
- Benefit of Preparing: Knowing someone's wishes in advance can reduce moral distress. It helps you feel like you honoured what mattered to them.
- Getting People Support Helps You Too: Connecting someone to palliative or wraparound care doesn't just help them, it lightens your load and affirms that you didn't carry it alone.
- "I'm Not Crying, You're Crying": You don't need a formal group to feel supported. Often, support shows up in jokes, shared silences, or small check-ins with people who understand.
- Memorial Spaces at Work: Memorial walls, banners, zines, or rituals can offer space for grief and remembrance, especially when optional and culturally safe.
- Collective Debriefing: Talking about a death as a team (what happened, what was hard, what went well) can shift grief from silent shame to shared learning and healing.

Closing Reflection

Grief is Real. So are we.

Grief isn't something to fix. It's something to feel, name, and carry together. In this work, grief is constant. It's tied to injustice. But it's also tied to love, to meaning, and to relationships that matter.

You're not broken for feeling it. You're not weak for needing support. And you're not alone in carrying it.

Grief is not just yours to carry — it's ours.

