



Personality and Grief:

A Unique Perspective of Mutual Impact

MyNHPCO Bereavement Professional Community Chat
May 2019

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Personality and Grief: A Unique Perspective of Mutual Impact

*MyNHPCO Bereavement Professional
Community Chat*

May 1, 2019

Today's Speaker



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LMFT, FT

- The Elizabeth Hospice

Learning Objectives

1

Explain and demonstrate the mutual impact of grief and personality styles

2

Predict instances in which bereavement could diminish the ability to function among those with rigid personality styles

3

Identify a practical approach for supporting those whose personality is a significant factor in the healing process



Personality and Grief

What is **GRIEF**?

an individualized
and normal
response to loss

the inward
experience of a loss

Grief has emotional,
cognitive, physical,
behavioral, social, and
philosophical/spiritual
dimensions.

What do we mean by BEREAVEMENT ?

a state of living with a loss

a state of having experienced the death of someone to whom one feels attached

the adjustment that results from that loss

a normal process a person goes through when someone dies.

We recognize
COMPLICATED Grief

when the grief
process does not
follow the
expected pattern

It is distinguished from a
simple grief process by its
severity, duration, and
the person's level of
functioning

Grief

Simple
grief



Complicated
grief

Mediators of Grief

Who is the person
that has deceased

How the person died

Personality
variables

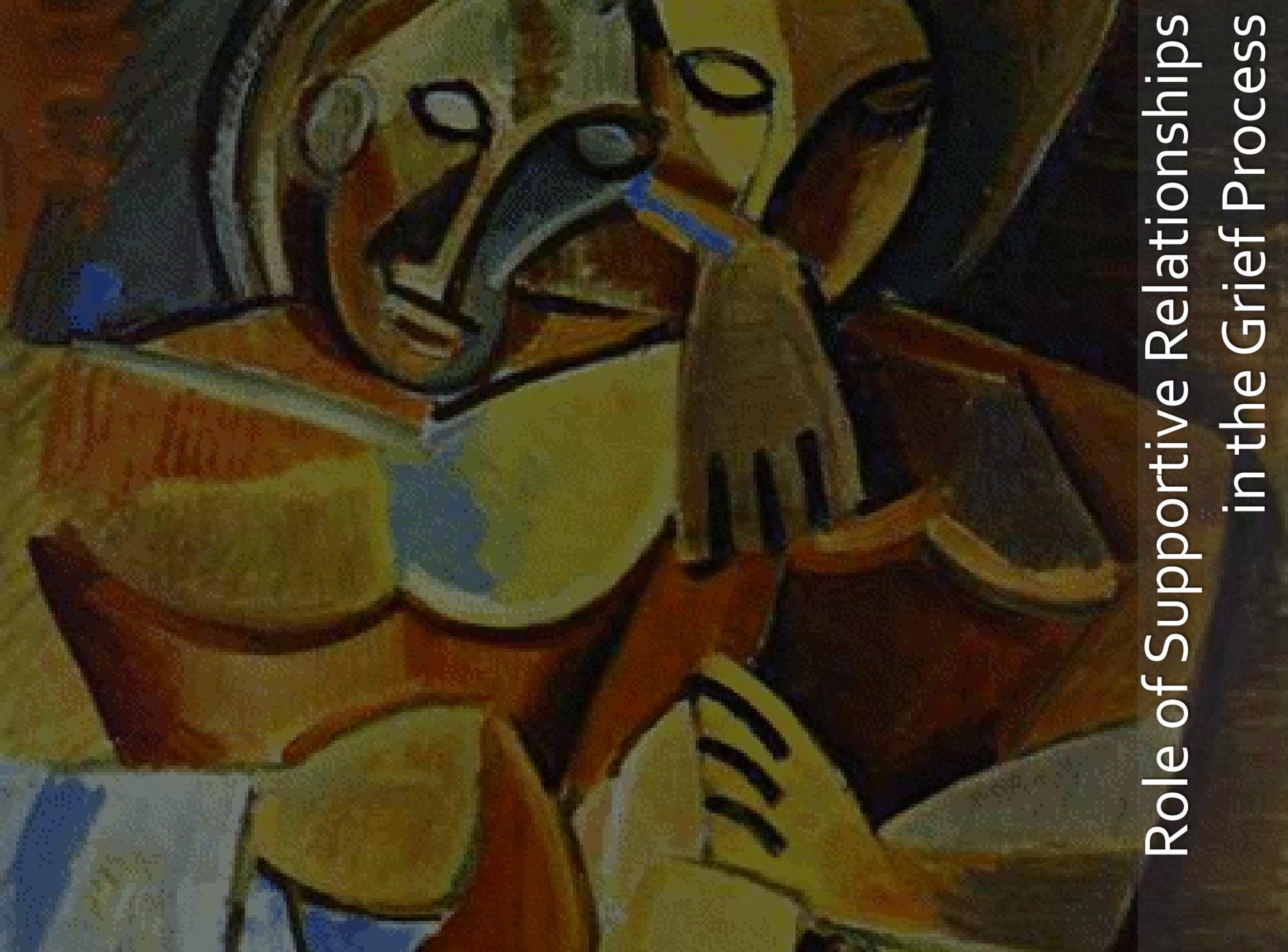
Existing social
support system

The nature of the
attachment

Concurrent stressors

Personality and Grief





Role of Supportive Relationships
in the Grief Process

Role of Supportive Relationships

The degree of perceived emotional and social support from others is significant in the grieving process.

While social support can lessen the blow of a loss, it does not accelerate the grief process.



(Worden, 2009)

Mediators of Social Support

Support Satisfaction

Social Role Involvement

Religious Resources and Ethnic
Expectations

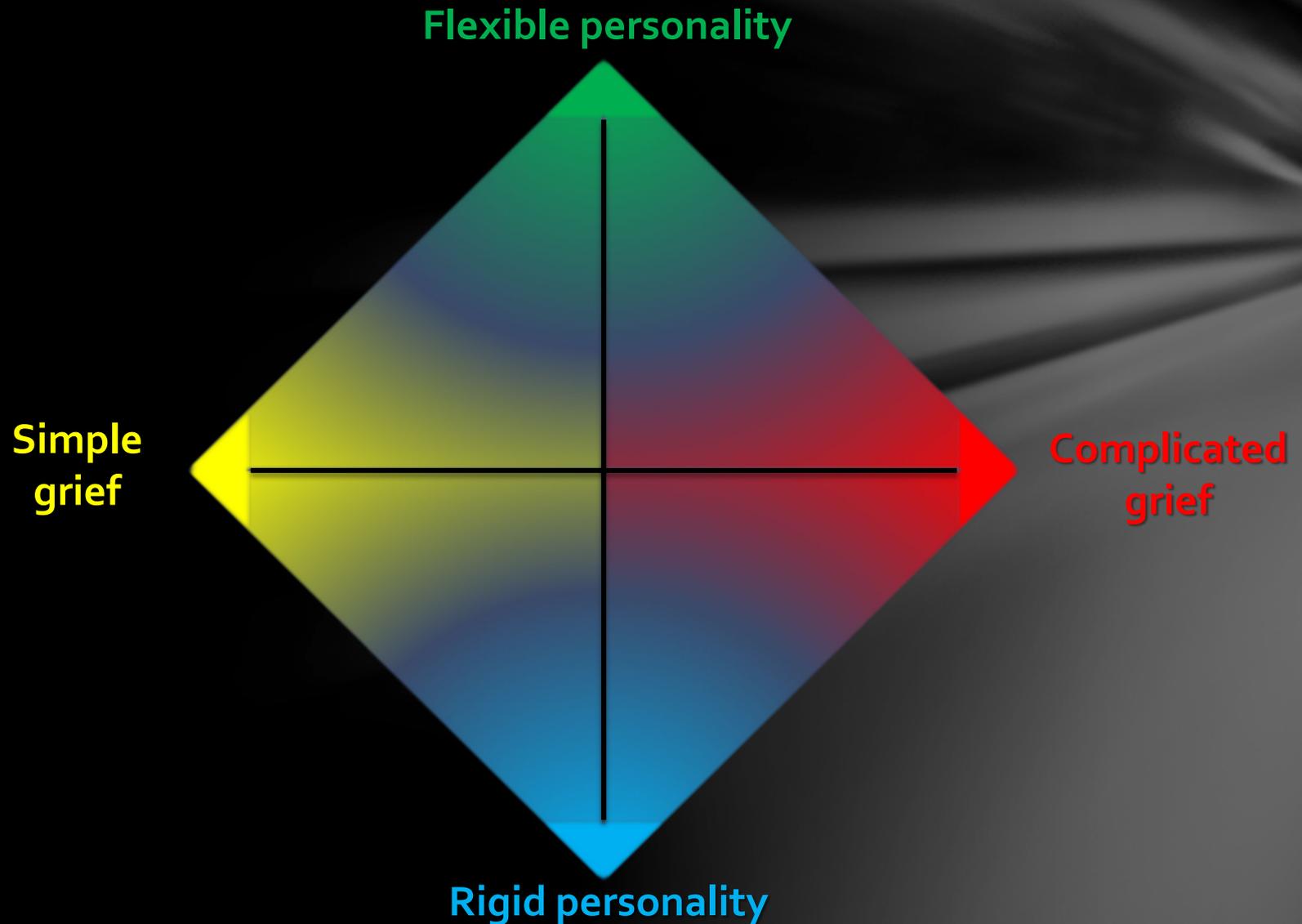
Personality

Flexible personality



Rigid personality

Effects of Personality on Relationships





Case Study & Interventions

“Joseph”

Demographics

Joseph was a 72 year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, widowed male

Spouse/Patient, died after 16 days on hospice service

Married 23 years (3rd marriage); 1 adult stepson

High socioeconomic status

No spiritual belief system

Atypical course of counseling in hospice context: 2 years and 2 months

Presenting Problems

Initial assessment: High bereavement risk

No appetite, Losing weight, Insomnia

Anxious, Lonely, Overt anger, Short-term memory loss

Risk factors for complicated grief:

Living alone, inadequate coping skills, familial conflict, impacted by stepson's reported chemical dependency

And – avoided internal grief process by projecting anger and blaming stepson.

Personality Traits, Behaviors & Strengths

Arrogant

Demanding

Lack of empathy

Entitled

Poor problem-solving behaviors

Saw others as "letting (him) down"

Accepted no responsibility for relational conflict

Blame-shifting

"Victim"

Rigid

Intelligent

Poor communication skills

Excessive story-telling in graphic detail

"Self-righteous"

Attractive

Approach and Interventions

- Managing vs treating his personality style

- Most important factor: Ability to form a relationship with therapist

Other factors that contributed to success:

- - Time (2 years)
 - Motivated (eventually)
 - Could partially acknowledge his role (eventually)

Approach and Interventions



Tolerated transference & countertransference



Patient with storytelling and pace



Accepted client's reason for counseling



Not overly nurturing; not overly attached stance

Approach and Interventions

- ❑ Avoided trying to prove a point or criticize
- ❑ Avoided confronting his “specialness”
- ❑ Allowed him to “teach” or “enlighten” me
- ❑ Chose one behavior & ignored other behavior/personality deficits
- ❑ Framed solutions as ways of getting what he wanted

Summary of Therapeutic Approach

1 Behavioral techniques

- Reinforcement
- Extinction

2 Conversational techniques

- Questions that helped him see consequences
- Constructive feedback after support & empathy

3 Diagnostic Reframing

- Reframed desired behavior as a better version of his personality style

Summary and Conclusions

Supportive relationships & personality mutually impact one another and directly affect one's grief experience.

Awareness of interplay between personality & grief allows one to better support clients.

Supportive relationships are often detrimentally affected by personality styles, especially with complicated grief.

Summary and Conclusions

Helpful interventions:

- Behavioral Techniques
- Conversational Techniques
- Diagnostic Reframing

(Lester/Cross Country Education, G. 2014. Personality disorders and the DSM-5. Brentwood, TN: Cross Country Education)

Next Steps



Future discussion and
research in this area

Questions?



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Acknowledgment

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