



*Living* with a  
GRIEVING HEART

THOUGHTS FROM A GRIEF WARRIOR

# Objectives:

1. Understand the expected immediate changes in a patient's mental, physical and cognitive status upon the death of a loved one.
2. Review the challenges of a grief-stricken patient in the first year following their loved one's death.
3. Outline methods that healthcare providers can use to counsel grieving patients as they confront these challenges
4. Discuss how providers can facilitate a grieving patient's movement through these challenges and ultimately achieve a fulfilling, enjoyable life.



I am *Marianne*

a **Grief Warrior**





# Who Is Grieving in the U.S.?

COVID-19 > 1,144,000 deaths<sup>1</sup>

each with **9** affected grievers<sup>2</sup>

totaling > **10 million** Americans who are grieving

100,000 **overdose** deaths per year<sup>3</sup>

x 9 grievers = **1.5 million** grievers

Study in 2019 found that **57%** of Americans experiencing loss in the preceding **3 years**<sup>4</sup>

Majority of our country is grieving at the same time

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/mortality-overview.htm>

2. Verdery *et al* PNAS 117 (30) 17695-17701

3. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

4. WebMD & AmeriSpeak survey, "Grief: Beyond the 5 Stages," May 2019.  
<https://www.webmd.com/special-reports/grief-stages/20190711/grief-beyond-the-5-stages-survey-methodology>

# WHAT LEADS TO GRIEF

Have you gone through any of the following in the past 3 years?

Death of a family member or close friend, excluding your child or partner	32%
Loss of a friendship/relationship	29%
Family member's serious illness or diagnosis of a chronic health condition	23%
Death of your pet	20%
Your own serious illness or diagnosis of a chronic health condition	15%
Loss of job/career	11%
Loss of home or possessions	4%
Divorce	4%
Death of a spouse/partner	3%
Death of your child	2%

# What we will Talk About:

Shock / Surprise

*“New Normal”*

**Firsts Without**

Grief Over

Time  
*Finding Gratitude*



# SHOCK / SURPRISE

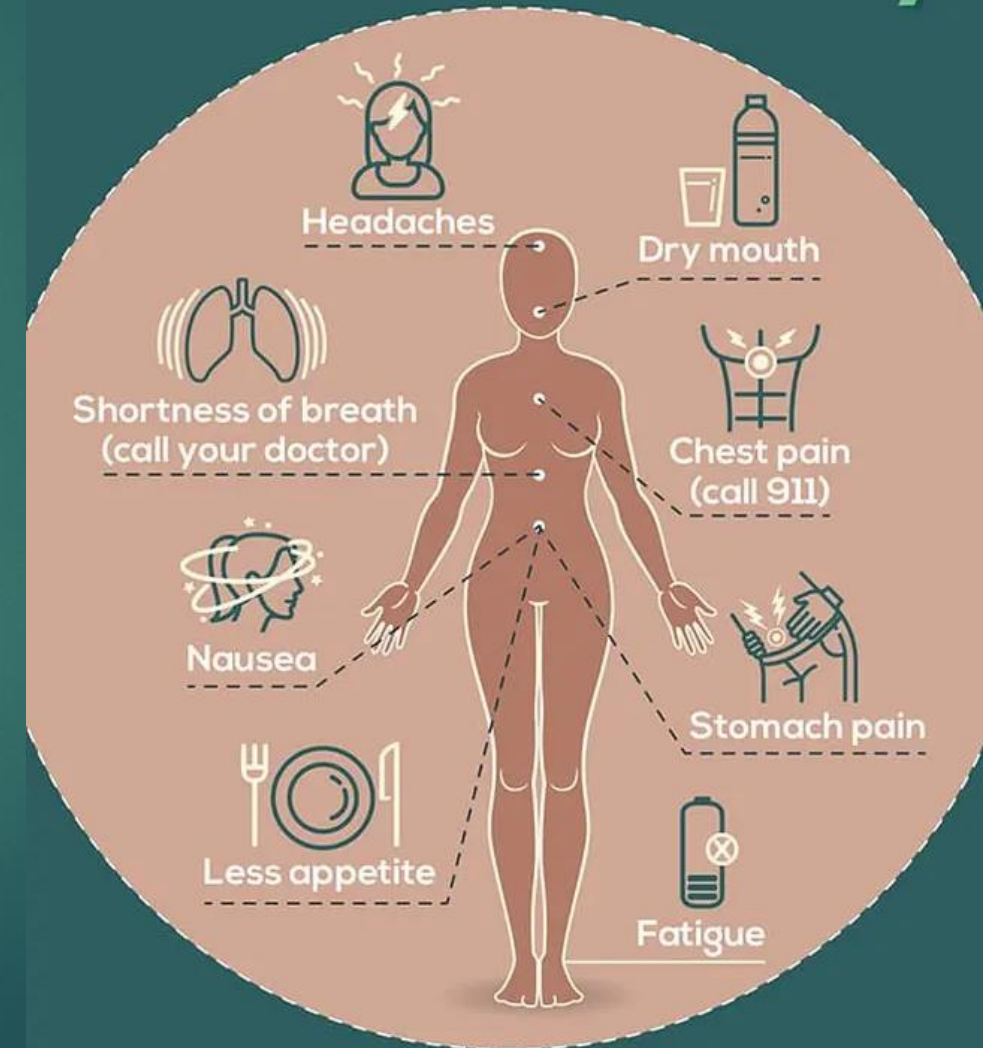
Emotions / Feelings

Physical Changes

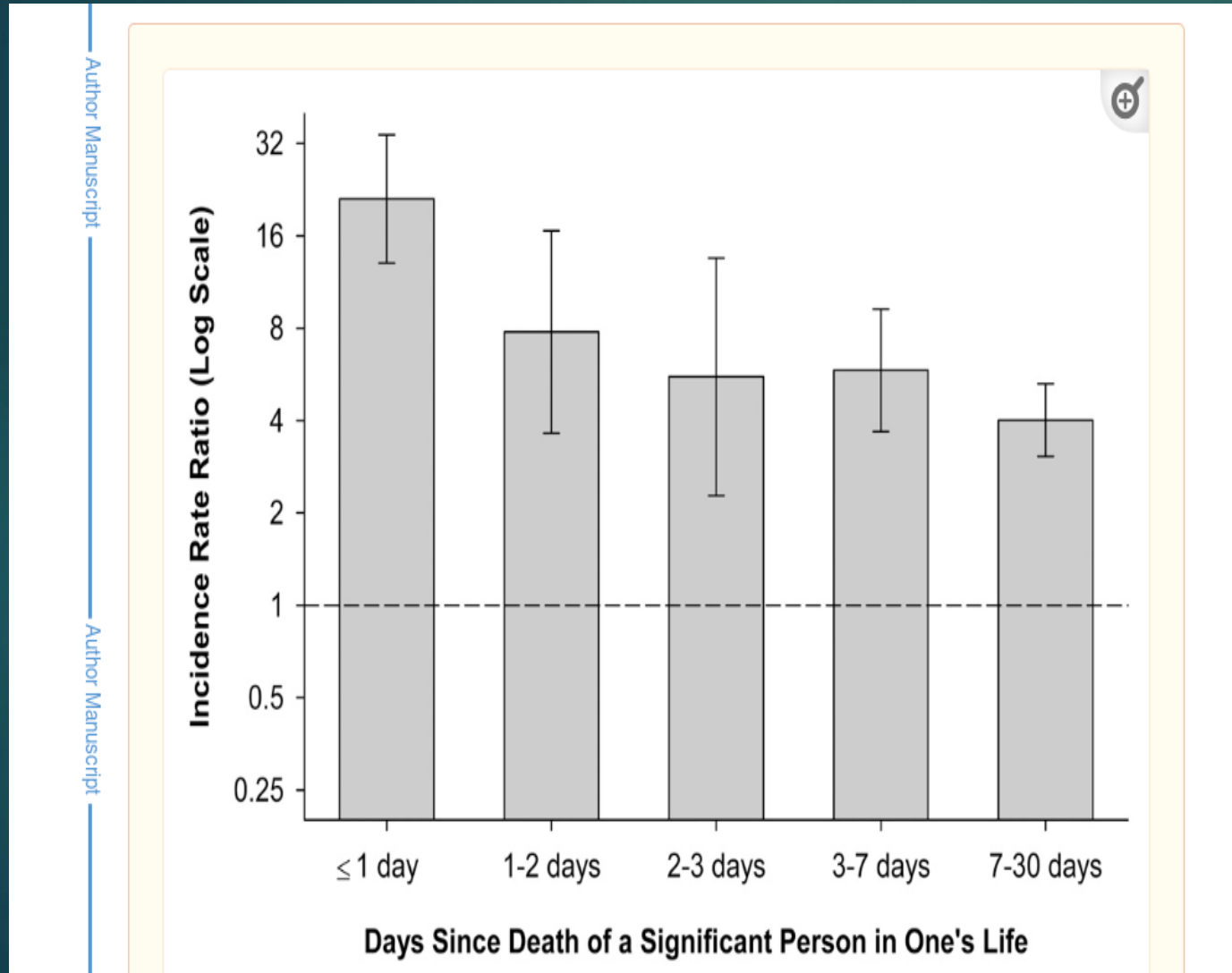
Brain Changes

WebMD

## Ways Grief Can Affect Your Body



# Takotsubo cardiomyopathy



# Blood chemistry changes

Elevated cortisol

Elevated sympathetic activity

Elevated vascular resistance

Elevated inflammatory markers

Elevated prothrombotic response

Changes are the same as seen in acute MI with increased

ST changes

Phosphokinases

Troponins

# How do we engage?

Listen, listen, listen

*Show up, just be present*

**Close the computer**

Look into the griever's eyes

*Hold hands*

Offer a hug

# What **NOT** to Say:

(or stupid things people say when they are trying to make you feel better)

*“I **know** how you feel.”*

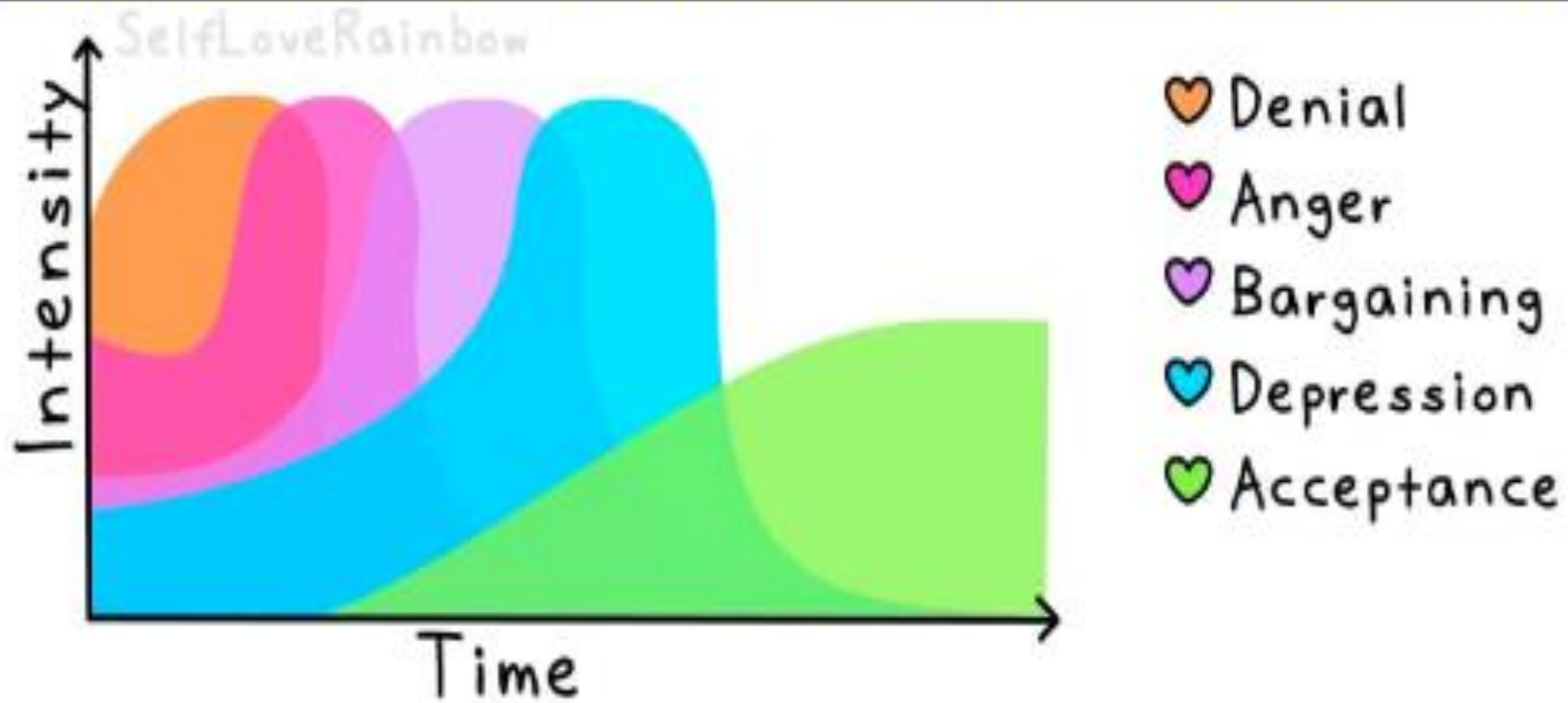
“You have so much to be thankful for.”

“Time heals all wounds.”

“It’s God’s will.”

“Everything will be OK.”

# What We Think Grief Looks Like



# What We Think Grief Looks Like



- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

# What It Actually Looks Like



- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Guilt
- Numbness
- Anxiety
- Acceptance
- \*and so much more

# Worden's **Tasks** of *Mourning*

- 1) Accept the **reality** of loss
- 2) Process the **pain** of grief
- 3) Adjust to **a world without** the deceased
  - External: everyday life
  - Internal: affected feelings about self and abilities
  - Spiritual: affected beliefs and views of the world
- 4) **Find an enduring connection** with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life



# Find a 'New Normal' through Calming

Calm the **mind** / Calm the **body**

*Relax the jaw (the key to the vagus)*

**Breathe**

*Mindfulness*

**Touch**

*Movement*

**Yoga / Tai Chi**

*Free Writing*

**Art**

*EMDR*

**Music**

# Creating a **New Normal**

- Ask for help / make a list
- Make important decisions before noon
- Take a **NO GRIEF** Day
- Get out in **Nature**:
  - use the five **senses** to focus
- Volunteer
- Practice **self compassion**

# The First Year and Beyond

Firsts *without* \_\_\_\_\_

- Grief **fluctuates**
- Don't feel bad about **feeling good**
- Plan for the expected **tough** days
  - Anniversaries
  - Birthdays
  - Holidays
- Be with **family** / **friends**

# Finding an **enduring connection** with the deceased. . .

- Make room for thoughts of your lost loved one:
  - Include in a prayer
  - Tell an uplifting story
  - Make their favorite meal
  - Listen to their favorite song
  - Watch a movie you enjoyed together
- *Then. . .*
  - ***Let go and stay in the present***

# Grief Over Time

**How** shall I grieve?

**How long** will I grieve?

**Letting go** of Pain. . .

. . . **Holding on** to memories

# Finding Gratitude

**Happiness** is letting go of what you thought your life should be and embracing and engaging in all that it is now.

- I woke up. I am OK. My family is good. This is the start of a new day.
- *Look how far I have come.*
- I am not a victim
- I am a **victor**.







# Elizabeth Kubler Ross

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern.

Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Life is Precious

So are **YOU!**