

# THE ELDERLY PERSON'S MOURNING IN THE SHADOW OF MULTIPLE LOSS

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The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 1:

This mourning threatens to take much longer than the environment may assume

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 2:

Prevalence of psychic problems

Prevalence of physical problems

without any ostensible cause

often these symptoms go unnoticed

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 3:

Most people are convinced that

an elderly person's grief

- is self-evident

- something that goes hand in hand

with the ageing process

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 4:

People cannot readily see

why an elderly person should need specific help or counselling

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 5:

The specific capability of the elderly:

- to accept the situation
- to experience everything
- to ignore the situation

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 6:

The elderly refuses to express his emotions

- He hides his feelings

- He don't want to inconvenience anyone

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Reason 7:

The elderly is aware that his own death is impending

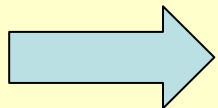
and this idea, too,

he will need to learn to deal with

The grief experience of an elderly person is hard to fathom

Conclusion:

The grieving process may weaken the elderly person



at the cost of life quality

# Mourning

Every mourner experiences

Physical consequences

Emotional consequences

Social consequences

Spiritual consequences

→ to accept

→ to do something with it

Difference of the grieving process  
between a younger and older person

Older people grieve against  
the background of multiple losses

The consequences  
are not isolated facts

# Multiple losses

## on the physical level

- Wear of the body with all kinds of limitations
- Risk of being affected by some illness
- Reduction of capacities

# Multiple losses

## on the psychic plane

Changes of control over himself

Autonomy acquires another mitigated definition

Lack of safety, certainty and security

Questions his own value and social status

Becomes aware the need to give up certain ideals

# Multiple losses

## **the social sphere**

Has to let go certain 'roles' and contacts

Changed concept of 'togetherness'

Relations with family, friends take a  
different turn

Loss of various contemporaries

His engagements will need to be balanced in  
view of his own 'capacity'

# Multiple losses

## **the spiritual domain**

Questions related to

- the point of his existence
- his personal perspective
- the feasibility of his aims
- his own realisation of self

May lose his sense of dignity,

May lose his self-image

# Multiple losses

**Loss in the cognitive and intellectual level**

He wrestles with the capacity to solve problems

He struggles with memorising, learning, reading and thinking

A waning capability to function intellectually

A waning capability to communicate

# Multiple losses

## **On the practical level**

Decrease in activities and pursuits

Loss of skills

A drop of income (money problems)

A lack of mobility, regularity, privacy

A move to a different environment

# Multiple losses

## **On the individual level**

Losses from the past come to surface

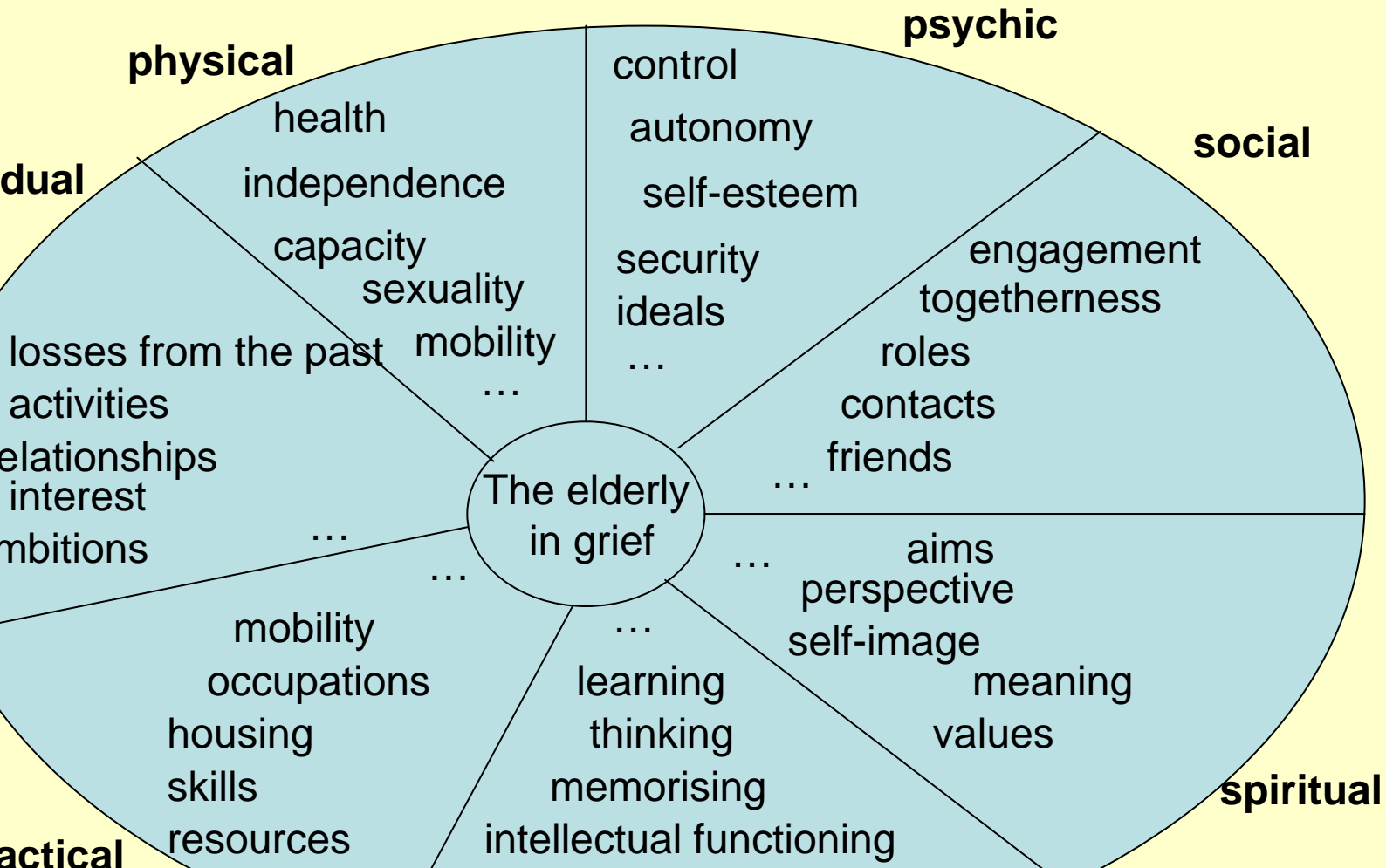
Broken relationships

Job loss

Never realised dreams or projects

The death of beloved persons

# The wheel of loss



When the elderly person is  
to come to terms with the death  
of a loved one  
under these circumstances  
he risks he cannot cope  
with the succession of losses  
and may be faced with  
a multiple loss syndrome

The death of a dear  
is part of a complex  
of multiple instances of loss

# If we just focus on one loss

we risk that:

We don't know which loss brings the elderly out of balance

Nothing will be done about it

We work at a loss that was already accepted

**IT IS VITAL TO DETECT WHICH LOSS HINDERS THE HEALING PROCESS!**

It is important

To acknowledge the multiple  
experiences of loss

To identify the losses

# In the case of bereavement

It is crucial to investigate and interpret  
what every loss means for the elderly  
person

not

The attention of the elderly is directed  
towards his inward self

He occupies himself with matters which,

to us, seem trite

# Consequences of multiple loss syndrome

## BURNOUT BY MOURNING

the elderly person has suffered  
so much bereavement already

that mourning reactions no longer  
occur when a new loss takes place

→ The emotional fuel, necessary  
to be able to grieve is burnt up  
completely

# Burnout by mourning

psychological closeness is developed  
which can cause

- \* feelings of depression
- \* feelings of despair
- \* evasiveness
- \* suppression
- \* denial

# Consequences of multiple loss syndrome

## OVERLOAD BY GRIEF

The bereaved does not know exactly  
which loss is throwing him out of balance

The consecutive losses can overwhelm  
or overpower him

→ No time or opportunity to mourn  
'normally'

# Overload of grief

the elderly person is paralysed

no longer feels emotions

→ This makes him very vulnerable!

# Consequences of multiple loss syndrome

## SELF-CARE

Losses that have not been dealt with

Could cause a lack of self-care

Can crush the ambition to look

after oneself

We have to realise  
the significance of the death  
in relation to other situations  
of loss

We have to be careful not  
developing a blind spot for the  
traumatic consequences of the  
elderly person's mourning in the  
shadow of multiple loss!



the elderly person in grief:

is confronted with multiple loss  
situations

is confronted with several barriers

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Relational obstacles

- The loss
- Relationship with the children
- Family
- A new relationship

Barriers which may encumber  
the normal course of grief

## Social Obstacles

- Social isolation
- Hushing up

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Practical obstacles

- Housing
- Developing skills

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Financial obstacles

- Money
- The inheritance

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Medical obstacles

- The deceased partner's process of decay
- Health problems
- Use of medication/drugs

Barriers which may encumber  
the normal course of grief

Cultural obstacles

- Rituals

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Spiritual obstacles

- Personal awareness of one's own impending death
- Future perspectives

# Barriers which may encumber the normal course of grief

## Psychic obstacles

- Disenfranchised grief (Doka)
- Memories
- Self-Worth
- Loss of control
- Death wish

Helping a bereaved elderly person

patientia vestra habetis animam vestram

*“In your patience lies your soul”*

*Dr. C.G. Jung*