

Title: Mindfulness practices for grieving during the COVID pandemic

To slow the spread of COVID-19, unprecedented global measures have been taken to limit in-person contact, including mandated social distancing and orders to shelter in place. These social isolation measures are an effective means of flattening exponential rates of infection, but they also introduce a host of considerable life-challenges. Those grieving pre-COVID deaths may now be limited in their access to social support networks and unable to engage in many of their self-care and coping routines. In addition, social isolation measures are often associated with a host of additional non-death losses, including a diminished sense of control and predictability. The mindfulness approach offers mental health professionals a framework for negotiating the trying circumstances of the COVID pandemic with their grieving clients. The philosophy and practice of mindfulness was formulated by the Historical Buddha to deal with universal existential concerns such as how to overcome the seeming isolation of the self as well as derive a sense of purpose in an apparently unpredictable and meaningless world. Of particular concern to ancient Buddhism was how to use mindfulness meditation to overcome the anxiety of death, grief, and unsought change. In these ways, mindfulness appears tailor-made as a practice for supporting grieving clients during the isolating, uncertain, and rapidly evolving COVID pandemic. This webinar features Dr. David Zuniga, a psychologist and Zen priest, who will be interviewed by Worth Kilcrease, a Licensed Professional Counsellor and thanatologist, on the use of mindfulness as an adjunct to grief therapy practice in the context of COVID. Dr. Zuniga will draw on his knowledge of original Buddhist texts, the Pali Cannon, to explore how psychologists can use mindfulness to foster contentment with solitude and bolster resilience during the pandemic. He will discuss the manual-based approach to the practice of mindfulness that was presented in the Pali Cannon, emphasizing its compatibility and popular use within contemporary evidence-based interventions.

Learning objectives:

- 1) Identify how grieving can be supported by mindfulness practices during the COVID pandemic
- 2) Recognize how non-death losses associated with the COVID pandemic can be addressed by mindfulness practices
- 3) Discuss the Buddhist foundations of mindfulness as they apply to the practice of grief therapy

Bio:

Dr. David Zuniga earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology and is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Austin, Texas, specializing in mindfulness-based approaches to counseling and wellness. In addition to individual therapy, his psychology practice includes mindfulness-based stress reduction seminars, grief groups, and therapy groups for caregivers and patients confronted by incurable illnesses. Previously, he was a faculty member in the Integrative Medicine Department at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Prior to becoming a psychologist, Dr. Zuniga earned his Master of Divinity degree from Harvard, which led to him becoming the first westerner to be ordained in the Taego Order (one of the two largest and oldest lineages of Zen Buddhism in South Korea), and the third Buddhist to become a licensed hospital/hospice chaplain in the United States. In his earlier career, Dr. Zuniga worked

as a Zen/interfaith chaplain in both pediatric and adult end-of-life care for over a decade. He also holds a Masters degree in literature. He has published widely and spoken internationally at leading academic conferences on mindfulness, grief, and end-of-life related issues. For free resources, and to learn more about his interdisciplinary work you can visit his website: www.drdauidzuniga.com.

Indicator: Resources and Research

Presentation Level: Intermediate

References

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