



What's grief? Training Bite 1

Case study: Gwen is a new resident at her RACF. She lost her husband Frank of 52 years in the past 12 months. Staff are beginning to notice that she doesn't want to mix with the other residents and has dinner in her room. Gwen is irritable with staff and has started saying she doesn't think she is able to walk outside anymore. Gwen has also told staff that she is awake most of the night. Some staff are saying they are frustrated as it appears that Gwen has 'given up'.

How would you approach her?

What works?

What doesn't work?

Some tips:

- Acknowledge her loss, give Gwen compassion and your time. Sometimes older people need more time to become aware of their feelings and express them. Giving an older person extra time shows that you are concerned and respectful of their needs.
- Point out signs of sadness or changes in Gwen's behaviour. This may help her to become aware of her feelings and to feel more comfortable talking with you about what she is feeling.

- Older adults often have many major losses within a short period of time', including loss of a partner, home, financial security, social contacts, independence and physical strength.
- Is there an anniversary of a loss that is approaching? How can we help Gwen through this time? Are there any traditions or customs that Gwen would like to continue?
- Gently encourage connection with others in the residence
- Grief and loss can highlight that a person's sense of purpose is also lost. Finding hobbies or activities that Gwen can succeed in, may lead to a new sense of purpose.
- Encourage Gwen to seek professional support if her grief does not seem to be easing over time, or if the grief continues to get in the way of daily functioning.

Tips for trainers:

Any contributions from participants are helpful, people learn from hearing good and not so good advice, accept all contributions.

Reflect any good piece of information back positively and highlight it.

You don't need all the answers, you do need them to start thinking about how they interact.