

## **Cultural Competency in Grief and Loss**

Categorizing grief responses of various cultural groups allows us a starting point in our understanding of the grief experience of an individual within that group. We do, however, need to remain vigilant with regard to the range of possibilities in grief within each cultural group. Given the multicultural nature of our society today, there are large variations even among homogeneous cultures. These variations need to be acknowledged so stereotypes do not occur.

### **Characteristics of the clinician that are important in providing culturally competent care**

1. The clinicians' awareness of his/her own multicultural heritage and his/her values related to grief and loss
2. Awareness of how these values might play a part in the relationship with the mourner

### **Working with mourners from a different culture**

1. Determine what an individual's beliefs are about what happens after death
2. Determine what is considered an appropriate emotional expression and integration of the loss in that culture
3. Asking what the gender rules are for handling the death
4. Ask whether certain types of death carry a stigma
5. Understand in a broader sense how the culture interprets stress, stress management, and level of functioning
6. Understand what role social and kin networks as well as religion play in providing support during the mourning process

### **Remember the following guidelines**

- ▶ Think of yourself as a guest in their world.
- ▶ Ask about their customs and traditions.
- ▶ Identify the degree of acculturation and assimilation the individual appears to have toward the dominant culture.
- ▶ Assess the degree of involvement with both the culture of origin and the host culture.
- ▶ You may need to give them permission to experience some things that we may define as normal, but they may define as unacceptable, or vice versa. Even people whose faith and/or cultural tradition is familiar to you, may vary regarding their understanding of what is acceptable for them to do and experience.
- ▶ Be careful not to evaluate culturally relevant mourning behaviors as abnormal.

- ▶ Listen to what they have to say. Observe their reactions.
- ▶ Ask leading questions. Ask them what they want – they will tell you. Don't assume you know what people may want to do may want from you.
- ▶ Do not talk or lecture them on what they need until you hear what they are experiencing.
- ▶ Pass on what you have learned to others who may be encountering this family.
- ▶ Lastly, remember, there is great power in just being present with a mourner from any culture. Visiting, calling, showing concern, and offering help and suggestions based on your assessment of their needs goes a long way. Often, all people need is to know that someone cares.