

# THE GRIEF-SENSITIVE HEALTHCARE PROJECT: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR PERINATAL GRIEF AND LOSS

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## 1 BACKGROUND

The perinatal period is one of the most vulnerable times for parents and families when, even in the best of circumstances, this significant life transition can include experiences of loss, grief, and bereavement. Although there has been a shift in healthcare to highlight patient and family voices and to develop more trauma-responsive practices, grief-sensitive care has largely been left behind.



Bereaved families often highlight the need for more authentic, open, and clear communication from their healthcare providers, while healthcare providers often report discomfort talking about grief, death, and dying.

Despite miscarriage occurring in roughly 1 in 4 pregnancies and infant deaths occurring in roughly 5.4 infants per 1000 live births, grief, loss, and bereavement remain neglected in medical training.



“They definitely closed ranks, the doctors did. There was a shutdown on information. The nurses were fabulous, our saving grace. They encouraged us to take pictures. I had her for 24 hours and that was great, but the doctors were—it was like some kind of code of silence. You ask your doctor what happened. They say, “I don’t know.” [...] There was this silence. I could just tell there was something going on that I wasn’t privy to.”

## 3 LESSONS LEARNED



Know Your Audience



Relatability Matters

*I’ve been thinking so much about you. How are you feeling? ... I imagine there might be a lot on your mind right now. Can we think together about how you would like to have a lasting bond with [child].*

Concrete Skills and Interactive Content



Fear of Emotional Overwhelm



Consideration of Systemic Barriers

## 2 GETTING TO WORK

The Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project (GSHP) is a collaboration between the Yale Child Study Center, Child Bereavement UK, and the New York Life Foundation. GSHP aims to provide educational trainings on grief-care to healthcare professionals.



- Develop a multidisciplinary team
- Adapt content
  - Reflective Practice
- Create materials and website
- Deliver trainings and receive feedback



- Over 30 trainings to more than 645 healthcare professionals. Participants represent:
- All levels of training (i.e., medical students, residents, fellows, and attendings)
  - Various disciplines (i.e., medical providers, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists)
  - Various specialties (i.e., ob-gyn, neonatology, pediatrics, hematology, and oncology)

## 4 THE GRIEF-SENSITIVE HEALTHCARE PROJECT

Goals of Training:

1. Make trainings feasible and accessible
2. Expand perceptions of and approaches to grief care
  - a. 5 tenets of GSHP
3. Provide education on grief in one’s context and grief theory
4. Introduce and engage in the Reflective Practice approach
5. Support with applying grief-sensitive care in own setting



## 5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- During a time as dynamic and vulnerable as the perinatal period, innovative models of clinical training and practice are essential.
- In addition to bereavement and child loss, many families, experience multiple forms of grief along their perinatal journey and healthcare providers should be prepared to sensitively respond.
- Training in reflective practice provides opportunities and skills for clinicians to better reflect on and address their own emotional needs during grief care
- Clinicians of all disciplines working with the perinatal population, in all capacities, have the power to mitigate negative outcomes during perinatal grief and loss and to foster strong patient-provider relationships to support resilient infants, parents, and communities.

*“We definitely do not get enough of this topic in our undergraduate training, and in our field this is something we see frequently. Having tangible tools to use to help us to guide our patients and their families through the death, dying, and bereavement process is so invaluable.”*

—nursing student

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