



Coalition News

Quarterly Newsletter of the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support
P.O. Box 50651 ♦ Minneapolis, MN 5540 ♦ 763-391-3051 ♦ www.mcdes.org ♦ info@mcdes.org

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Since 1977...Education and Support for Those Providing Care to Grieving Persons

December 2019

Mark Your Calendars

Dec 10, 7-9 pm ♦ *Facing Holidays After the Death of a Loved One*. Information at <https://mnthresholdnetwork.wordpress.com>.

Feb 12-13, 2020 ♦ *Grief Support Services Facilitator Training*. This program is designed to teach participants about grief facilitation skills, group process and how to develop and organize a support group. Information at: www.essentiahealth.org/classes-events/ or griefcenter@essentiahealth.org.

April 5-7 ♦ MNPHC Annual Conference: *Honoring Our Past, Building Our Future*. Info at www.mnhpc.org.

April 6 ♦ MNPHC presents a conversation on end-of-life care with BJ Miller and Sunita Puri, hosted by Cathy Wurzer. Info on page 6 and at www.mnhpc.org.

April 24 ♦ MCDES Spring Conference. *Meaning-Centered Grief Therapy*. Info on page 10 and at www.mcdes.org.

April 27 - May 2 ♦ ADEC 2020 Annual Conference in Columbus, OH. Information at www.adec.org/page/2020_Conference.

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MCDES Fall Conference Review *Living with Grief in the Aftermath of Natural and/or Human Caused Tragedy*

Reviewed by Jacklin Steege

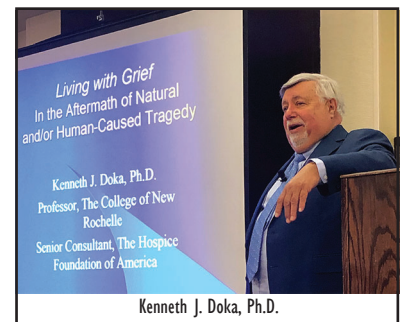
I had the great pleasure of attending the fall 2019 conference “Living with Grief in the Aftermath of Natural and/or Human Caused Tragedy” presented by Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D. I am currently the Red Cross Disaster Program Manager for Central Minnesota and admittedly probably an atypical participant to these conferences. I did spend several years prior to this career working with a local nonprofit that focused primarily on connecting individuals to area resources, family support services, and childcare respite. In my position now, however, natural and human caused tragedy and disasters are in the forefront of what I do and it’s part of my job to prepare and support a team of volunteers to respond to these events. I was naturally drawn to this conference to continue learning and find a fresh perspective.

My review will be of some key take-aways I found, primarily from a Red Cross response perspective.

Something Dr. Doka said that really stuck out to me was treating what the person presents. I see this as a great reminder and catalyst to deeper thought on how to actually help the person. In our work, it can easily become concerning or frustrating if a person is not reacting to an event the way we think they should. I often get feedback from volunteers, after working with clients, describing how the person/persons reacted and frequently they are laced with how the person wasn’t showing enough emotion or how the person was showing too much emotion. As Dr. Doka stated, we need to deal with the issues as the clients present them. When speaking about sudden loss, he pointed out that initially the feeling is first a loss of safety, followed by the grief. To me, this is just the tip of the iceberg and a huge reminder that, in my line of work, we may have no idea at what point in a person’s experience (or “recovery process” after a tragedy) we are first meeting them.

Other important points from Dr. Doka’s presentation were:

- Styles of Grief
 - Instrumental – typically men, problem-solving coping



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- Intuitive – typically women, emotional coping
- Resonating Trauma
 - People will try and restore the assumptive world – they will predict something bad will happen again and when it doesn't, it starts restoring their sense of safety
- Assisting Responders & Helpers
 - It is not one-size fits all – some people forced to focus on event and debrief may be more harmed by it than helped

Lastly, I wanted to review and share Dr. Doka's piece on violence and tragedy in schools and how it recently was reality to us here in Minnesota. He had many suggestions for reducing violence in schools and creating a school community, including teaching acceptance rather than tolerance. He suggests developing a crisis team in the school and having staff create a false 'all-clear' signal, both excellent ideas. Even had these plans proactively been in place, unfortunately they wouldn't have helped the exception we found ourselves in recently in Minnesota. Red Cross disaster mental health volunteers recently helped support a shooting event on tribal lands that took a lot of learning and listening to be able to support the grief and trauma that the tribal community was feeling after the

event. The large majority of our volunteers had never responded to a tribal event, so they received a 'job induction' before arriving to the scene. The induction focuses on the traditions, rituals, and past traumas of the community they were supporting. In Dr. Doka's presentation, he discussed the role of ritual in public tragedy. If you rephrased the heading and rethought our normal assumption of the word "ritual," his points would be just as applicable. Our volunteers were helping:

- Reaffirm the community,
- Show solidarity,
- Structure public grief, and
- Allow action at a disorganized time.

One of the biggest take-aways from Doka's presentation was the reminder to pose questions as choices. It empowers the individual and helps give them a sense of control, so they can start making choices on their own again. This seems an invaluable tactic which would not only help me get answers to questions I require, but at the same time, help the person with their grief and recovery.

Overall, I was pleased with this entire day, from the presenter to the accommodations. This was my first MCDES conference and I have the Dorothy Geis scholarship to thank. It was a fantastic opportunity for which I am very grateful. I will be sure to recommend future MCDES conferences to others.



Dr. Doka with Scholarship Recipients
Kiki Skyes, Hannah Olson, Vicki Richardson, Sandra Kruse, Jacklin Steege



Dr. Doka with MCDES Board Members
Kay Johnson, Amy Shaleen, Tim Thorpe, Kelli Kinney, Diane Bauer, Chris Lewis, Jan Bergman, Eunie Alsaker, Ed Holland, Allison Chant