

Living with Grief

In the Aftermath of Natural and/or Human-Caused Tragedy

Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D.
 Professor, The College of New Rochelle
 Senior Consultant, The Hospice
 Foundation of America

1

Introduction

People die as a result of traumatic injury and sudden death daily. Not all traumatic death victims die quickly; they may linger for a while. Not all sudden deaths are caused by violence.

When dying occurs as a result of traumatic or sudden death, the grief process for survivors may be difficult and delayed. The expertise of bereavement professionals and others can make a difference in how individuals and communities cope with these deaths.

2

A Personal Note *My Own Experience*



- Working in the field of grief for 48 years as researcher, educator, editor, counselor, and author
- Research has included traumatic events – including deaths in risky sports, drownings, sudden deaths, and public tragedy (Ed's contribution)
- Involved in events such as airline crashes, Sandy Hook, Coldenham, and 9/11

3

Goals

- Explore nature of tragedy and trauma
- Highlight special forms of sudden loss
- Explore grief reactions
- Review developmental perspectives and particular issues for children and adolescents
- Review interventive strategies including the importance of ritual and memorial
- Discuss self care strategies

4

What Is Trauma?

- Trauma involves two components
 - Loss and grief
 - The loss of an assumptive world (that the world is safe, predictable, and just)
- Conventional Wisdom—treat trauma (loss of assumptive world first)
- My comment – treat as client presents



5

What is a Public Tragedy?



- A collective trauma
- Overwhelming events
- Disrupt the social order
- Test adaptation

6

Public Tragedy

- C. Wright Mills makes a distinction between *private troubles* and *public issues*
- Example – John has a drinking problem. Alcoholism and drunk driving is a public issue



7

What Makes a Tragedy Public?

- *Scope*
- *Identification* with those affected
- *Social value* of those affected
- *Consequences* – social, financial, psychological, including social and legal changes resulting from the event
- *Duration*



8

The Role of Media and Public Tragedy

- Media has a *mediating* role in defining tragedy
- It makes us aware of a tragedy and helps define it
- Yet other issues such as identification and social value still have a critical role in shaping public perception
- I. e. Chenoble



9

A Tangent Humor and Public Disaster

- Humor as coping device
- Humor as double sword – offensive
- I often hypothesize that the speed at which jokes appear is an indirect measure of identification
- Chernobyl vs. 9/11



10

What Makes a Tragedy Public? Other Factors

- Natural to man-made continuum
- Degree of intentionality
- Degree of expectedness
- Degree of preventability
- Perception of suffering



11

Who Is Affected?

- Victims
 - Dead and injured
 - Witnesses
 - Indirect
 - Family/Intimate Network
 - Others Affected – i.e. unemployed etc.
- Responders/Rescuers
- Helpers – including medical personnel, funeral directors
- General Public



12

Common Responses to Tragedy



- Loss of the assumptive world
- The issue of grief + trauma
- Suddenness, unfinished business (and the role of ritual)
- Issues of preventability
- Powerlessness
- Intense reactions (possibly including anger, rage, anxiety, and survivor guilt)

13

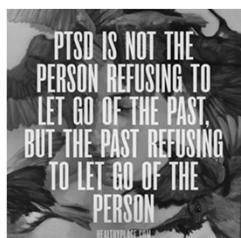
Ethnicity and Culture as a Mediator of Public Tragedy



- Culture can mediate response to trauma
- Some groups can experience past (and present) historical trauma
- Culture influences responses to trauma
- Differential social value and identification with different groups

14

Ethnicity and Culture as a Mediator of Public Tragedy



- Both the decision to migrate and the immigration experience can result from/in trauma
- These experiences may influence response to a tragedy
- For example – triggering untreated PTSD reactions

15

Rynearson's The 3 V's of Violent Dying

1. *Violence* – injurious action
2. *Violation* – transgressive
3. *Volition* – someone is responsible (commission or omission)



16

Sudden Loss Common Factors

- ▶ Loss of the assumptive world
- ▶ The issue of grief + trauma
- ▶ Suddenness, unfinished business (and the role of ritual)
- ▶ Issues of preventability
- ▶ Powerlessness
- ▶ Missing or disfigured body
- ▶ Intense reactions (including anger, rage, anxiety, and survivor guilt)
- ▶ Spiritual questions, such as the loss of a benevolent deity or lack of a just world

17

Sudden Loss Unique Factors to Public Tragedy or Disaster



- Strained support
- Multiple loss
- Concurrent crises
- A process that likely includes significant disenchantment

18

Sudden Loss *Unique Factors to Suicide*

- May be an element of a public tragedy
- Conflict and ambivalence
- Columbine
- Stigma and disenfranchisement
- Family stigma



19

Sudden Loss *Unique Factors to Homicide*



- Another possible factor
- Stigma and disenfranchisement
- Often relationship with both victim and perpetrator
- The media
- Criminal justice system
- Even if the survivor was not a witness, they may still have fantasized intrusive imagery – strong imaged of the imagined event (Blakley, 2009)

20

Clinical Evidence

- ▶ According to a report by Connie Saindon, MA, MFCC, CTS, clinical evidence supports the concept that, following a homicidal death, family members are at risk for developing sustained and dysfunctional psychological reactions.
 - ❖ There are almost 30,000 homicides annually in the United States (including car crashes caused by DUI and reckless driving)
 - ❖ Approximately a minimum of between 120,000 and 240,000 individuals are affected by the loss and will grieve
 - ❖ Survivors face challenges to their emotional, mental, and social health and well-being; homicidal bereavement represents a major public health problem

21

Secondary Victimization *Homicide*



- Refers to individual victims of homicide feeling an additional sense of being victimized after the homicide such as by the media which may denigrate the reputation of the deceased victim or the criminal justice system which might not capture the perpetrators, fail in prosecution, or besmirch the victim's reputation in court proceedings.

22

Sudden Loss *Unique Factors to Accidents*

- Issues of culpability
- Legal after-effects and adversarial legal system



23

Deaths in the Military

- Military ties are strong
- Work and live together
- Morale – *The American Soldier Study*
- Yet, loss often not acknowledged



24

Intervening After Tragedy

25

The Absence of a Body Complicates Grief

- Ambiguous Loss
- Grief tasks and the absence of remains
- The incomplete narrative and the issue of “accounting”
- The absence of a body and the effects on mourning over generations



26

The Importance of the Physical Remains

- A broader part of the cultural ethos – note the great effort to locate and retrieve the body of John F. Kennedy, Jr.



27

The Importance of Physical Remains

- Has even deeper roots in Western Culture
- The veneration of relics – remains of the Saints has a long history in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy



28

The Importance of the Physical Remains

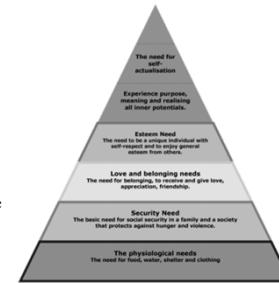


- Even when there is no body recovered, The Veterans Administration pays for a memorial headstone so families can honor their dead

29

Assisting Victims

- The caution of Maslow’s Hierarchy – basic needs take priority but address the needs as clients present them
- Sensitivity to Loss
- Validate Grief
- Trauma first? Meeting the victim where they are



30

Rynearson's Restorative Retelling



- Persons may often review and *re-enact* event
- May see themes of *remorse* ("I should have prevented this.")
- *Retaliation* ("I will get someone for this.")
- *Over-protection* ("This will not happen again.")
- Finally *restorative retelling* allows one to find some sense of meaning in the loss.

31

What is Grief?



- A reaction to loss
- Very individual – we each grieve in our own way
 - Relationship
 - Circumstances of death – and life
 - Support (internal and external)
 - Health
 - Culture and spirituality

32

Grief

- Affects us in many ways
 - Physically
 - Emotionally
 - How we think
 - Behave
 - Even spiritually



33

Styles of Grief

- Instrumental vs. Intuitive Styles
- Note a continuum
- Coping with grief and grieving styles as a family
 - Complementary or symmetrical?
 - Isolating or interacting?
 - Conflicting or respectful?
- How we grieve is not a measure of love



34

Developmental Perspectives on Grief

35

The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies

- The myth of children and loss



36

Children Historically Dealt with Death and Loss



- Games
- Books and Stories
- Jokes
- Songs
- Fairy Tales

37

Fairy Tales

- One of the roles of fairy tales may be to make sense of events that have occurred or to offer relief and direction for inner anxieties
- Many fairy tales incorporate themes of transition, death, or loss



38

Children Are Constantly Exposed to Death Now

- Television
- News
- Movies
- Video Games
- Life Experiences



39

Death Images and Children

- Kastenbaum notes that children now are *habitualized* to death
- That means that violent images are so widespread, it takes much more to shock



40



41

Children Are Constantly Developing

- Cognitively
- Emotionally
- Socially
- Spiritually



42

Young Children



- Animistic
- Artificialistic
- Blur boundaries between life and death
- Yet, “all gone” an early concept (Maurer)

43

Children Develop in Their Cognitive Mastery of Death

Conceptualizing Death

- Universality
 - Inevitable
 - All encompassing
 - Unpredictable
- Non-functionality
- Irreversibility
- Causality
- Continuation



(Brent & Speece)

44



45

Young Children Have a Short Feeling Span



- They can sustain intense emotions for a short time (Crenshaw)
- Implications for counseling

46

Children Develop Socially



- Cooley’s Play and Game Stage
- The Development of Empathy

47

Children as Spiritual Pioneers

R. Coles, *The Spiritual Lives of Children*



48

A Developmental Perspective

- Developmental theory emphasizes that children's capabilities are always developing.
- As children age, their abilities to understand and respond continue to develop
- Yet we must always remember that from the earliest ages, children are attempting to master and make sense of their world



49

Discussing Death with Children

- Always make sure you know the question the child is asking and the context (*Why is the question being asked now?*)
- Be honest but reassuring
- Keep the dialog open
- Ask for feedback
- Share faith and feelings



50

Grief May Be Manifested in Many Ways – Similar to Adults

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Cognitively
- Spiritually
- Behaviorally



51

Manifestations of Grief



- How sees homesick kids first?
- Children are prone to somatically display their grief reactions
 - Misinterpret physical manifestations of affect
 - Care eliciting
- Assess physical reactions such as aches and pains – persistent complaints should be treated

52

Manifestations of Grief

- Emotionally children may have similar reactions to adults
- Sadness
- Fears and anxieties
- Guilt and magical thinking
- Anger and the lack of control
- Other emotions



53

Manifestations of Grief

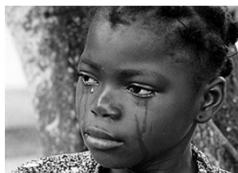


- Grief affects children and adults cognitively
- Depersonalization and denial
- Problems with concentration, lack of focus, impaired thought
- Many of the manifestations of grief can mimic learning disabilities
- Importance of loss inventory

54

Manifestations of Grief

- Children may react behaviorally – in many of the same ways as adults – avoiding or seeking reminders, withdrawal, crying
- May even include acting out behaviors



55

Yet, there are also differences

- To Bowlby early loss may impair trust and create attachment issues throughout life – (perhaps mitigated by continuity, story)
- Crenshaw and the crisis of impending connection



56

Other Differences

- Manifestations may include acting out, sleep disturbances, regressive behaviors, accidents, changes in behavior or grades
- Children may re-grieve earlier losses



57

Grief takes place in a family context

The Harvard Bereavement Study isolated a number of risk factors for both the child and the family. *Yet, these are best summarized as the best predictor of the child's adjustment is the ability of the surviving parent to function.*

58

Development Continues Through Adolescence

- Young
- Middle
- Old

59

Death is a Significant Undercurrent in Adolescence

- The Three “I’s” – Independence, Identity, Intimacy
- Time of critical evaluation
- Significant separations
- Problematic experiences of death
- Defended against by present orientation
- Invulnerability as fourth “I”



60

Adolescents Often Experience Difficulty as They Grieve

- Discomfort with differences
- Ability to seek support from adults
- Limits to peer support
- Time of spiritual questioning

61

Adolescent Grief

- Acting Out (including behaviors, substance abuse, sexual, eating disorders)
- School Performance
- Changes – Yet, Note Development
- Self-Esteem
- Anxiety



62

Adolescent Grief The Internet as Support



- Technology as difference
- Adolescents as *Digital Natives* (rather than *Digital Immigrants*)
- 93 % use the Internet, 79 % of 15-17 year-olds have cell phones
- Prevalence of *MySpace* and *Facebook*

63

Adolescents and the Internet

- The Internet allows experimentation with different personas
- Internet relationships can offer a sense of belonging
- The Internet can offer the possibility of validation without risk
- The Internet offers information independent of asking adults



64

Adolescent Grief The Internet as Support



- The Internet offers information about grief
- There are opportunities to memorialize online
- One can express grief to peers and others in blogs
- One can offer and receive support including in online support groups

65

The Internet and Adolescent Grief Support Dangers!

- Information may not be accurate
- Support groups may lack professional supervision and even be unsupportive
- Comments by others can be hateful, harmful, or denigrating
- The danger of vulnerable adolescents and online predators
- Internet options may make the adolescent less available for more suitable and qualified assistance



66

The Internet and Adolescent Grief Support

Points for the Counselor



1. Ask adolescents about the Internet and if and how they are using it as they cope with their grief
2. Create an ongoing dialogue about their Internet use

67

Disenfranchised Grief Sensitivity to Online Relationships

- Online Relationships
- Chat Room Relationships
- Participants in massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG)
- The funeral of Toxik/Chris



68

Children and Adolescent Grief



- Thus children and adolescents may experience periods of grief throughout the life-cycle
- In early loss, the *re-grief* phenomenon
 - As they struggle with identity
 - Developmental surges

69

Amelioration of Grief

- Over time the intensity of grief reactions lessen
- Persons function at similar (or sometimes better levels) than prior to the loss
- Yet, grief still has a developmental aspect

70

Continuing Bonds

- Memories
- Biography
- Legacies and liabilities
- Spiritually
- Extraordinary Experiences (LaGrand)



71

The Tasks of Grief

- Acknowledge the loss
 - Express manifest and latent emotion
 - Adjust to a changed life
 - Relocate the loss
 - Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss
- Worden (Modified)

72

Empower Families

- Children's Grief Takes Place in a Family Context
- Assess Rules and Communication
- Risk Factor – Parental Functioning
- Note Extended Family/ Intimate Networks



73

Effective Support for Children

The Value of Family Centered Counseling



- Provide Support for Parents
 - Process their grief
 - Skill-building including teaching them how to assist their children with secondary loss
- Provide Support for Children
 - Grief support
 - Adjusting to a new life

74

Schools Can Play a Critical Role



- Academic
- Social and Developmental Arena
- Sources of Formal and Informal Support
- "Early Warning" System
- Links Families

75

The Issue of Trauma

- Grief and Loss
- The Loss of an Assumptive World
- Mistrust and Anxiety
- Resonating Trauma (Rumor and the restoration of the assumptive world)



76

Assisting Responders and Helpers

CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Some debriefing is helpful
- Monitor responses
- The mixed evidence of CISD
 - No "one size fits all"
 - May heighten risk for some responders
- Provide a menu of options
- An experience with 9/11 firefighters

77

Helping the Public Cope with Tragedy

Principles that Need to Be Applied According to Developmental Level

- Acknowledge fear and other responses
- Offer honest reassurance
- Keep communications open
- Monitor media and Internet
- Empower actions
- The value of maintaining viable routines
- Watch for danger signs and refer when necessary
- Care for the carers!

78

Violence and Tragedy in Schools: A Special Issue

79

Violence in Children and Adolescents

- Social (media, availability of weapons, social status)
- Cultural
- Psychological
- Lessened Family Supervision
- Spiritual
- Technology (Violent Video Games, Internet, Cyber-bullying)
- The Socialization of Males



80

Reducing Violence in Schools



- Zero Tolerance and “True Threat”
- Zero tolerance vs. progressive discipline
- Staff Training
- Conflict Resolution
- Anti-bullying programs
- Supervision and policing
- Bolstering community (peer-centered programs)

81

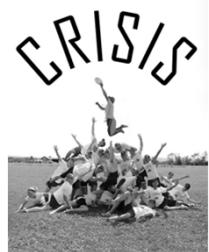
Creating School Community

- Teach acceptance rather than tolerance
- The importance of adult modeling
- Issues of size and organization



82

Developing a Crises Team in A School



- Develop a tentative core team
- Brainstorm possible traumatic situations that may occur
- List trained personnel within and without school
- Create logical protocols
- Plan for evaluation and adjustments

83

Violent Events

- Importance to have a “lock-down” and evacuation procedures along with regular drills
- There is value in educating staff in creating a false “all clear” signal in case the administrator is under duress
- Staff need to differentiate between true and false signals



84

Helping Children Cope with Tragedy

Principles that Need to Be Applied According to Developmental Level

- Acknowledge fear and other responses
- Offer honest reassurance
- Physical closeness (hugs, presence)
- Keep communications open
- Monitor media and Internet
- Empower actions
- The value of maintaining viable routines
- Watch for danger signs and refer when necessary
- Care for the carers!

85

Good Advice for Adults Too!

86

School Responses to Traumatic Loss

- Mobilize Crises Team after Verification
- Communication Chain – Inform Staff
- Media Plan and Spokesperson
- Inform Students
- Validate and Explore Responses
- Identify those “At-Risk”
- Set Up Counseling
- Remember Staff
- Shape Group Response
- Stakeholders and memorialization
- Inform Parents

87

The Value of a Shared Protocol

- Training in the protocol should include all school staff
- Children may relate well and share with adults not perceived to be in authority



88

After the Crisis



- Monitor those who witnessed the event for PTSD
- Remember PTSD needs treating by specialists

89

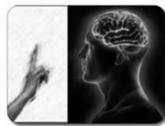
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Abbreviated)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event | D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal |
| B. The traumatic event is constantly re-experienced | E. Duration of symptoms longer than a month |
| C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the event | F. Symptoms impair functioning |
| ● Can be acute, chronic or delayed | |

90

Traumatic Loss may Involve Special Techniques

- ▶ **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing:** Often offered to first responders, but should be an option for others
 - No silver bullet
- ▶ **EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)**
- ▶ All of these techniques (and others) require special training



91

Expressive Approaches



- Art
- Movement/Drama/
Role Play
- Crafts
- Storytelling/Poetry/
Creative Writing
- Photography/Videos
- Music/Dance
- Games

92

The Value of Bibliotherapy

- Validation
- Suggestions for Coping
- Hope



93

Corr's Guidelines for Bibliotherapy



- Read and evaluate the book
- Be prescriptive!
- Note issue of image (i.e. diversity, timeliness etc.) – for client and for class
- Select appropriate title for capability and context
- Cope with limitations
- Discuss with child

94

Comments on Counseling *The Tasks of Grief*

- Acknowledge the loss
 - Express manifest and latent emotion
 - Adjust to a changed life
 - Relocate the loss
 - Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss
- Worden (Modified)

95

Special Issues in Trauma *Unfinished Business*

- Suddenness
- Empty Chair
- Letter
- Rituals of Reconciliation
- Moules—
Accessing the internalized other



96

Special Issues in Trauma Adjusting to a Life without the Deceased



- Suddenness of loss
- Multiple loss, possible disruptions
- Importance of choice and change

97

Special Issues in Trauma Spiritual Issues

- Where is, who is God?
- Random unfairness
- Exploring spiritual issues
- Therapeutic allies
- Prescriptive bibliotherapy



98

The Issue of Forgiveness



- Forgiveness is only an issue if it is an issue for the client!
- Forgiveness v. forgetting
- Forgiveness and justice
- Praying for strength to forgive
- Prayer as honest communication—dialogue

99

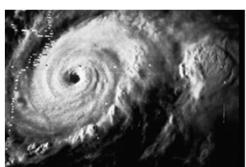
Another Perspective....

“
Always forgive your enemies — nothing annoys them so much.

OSCAR WILDE,
playwright and wit

100

Developing a Community Crises Team



- Develop a tentative core team
- Brainstorm possible traumatic situations that may occur – in Ohio possibly not hurricanes, but in Florida – major issue
- List trained personnel within and without Team
- Create logical protocols
- Plan for evaluation and adjustments

101

Team Debriefings

- After events, it is important to debrief the incident with crises staff and key administrators
- *Were procedures followed? How did the protocol work? What lessons were learned? What should be done differently?*
- Protocols also should be reviewed at the periodically



102

The Role of Ritual and Memorial in Public Tragedy

103

The Role of Ritual and Memorials

- ▶ Ritual can be a powerful tool as it offers symbolic mastery, something to do in a disorganized time, opportunity to finish business
- ▶ Memorials can also be useful (note the phenomena of spontaneous memorialization)
- ▶ Important that memorials be visited (choice) rather than confronted



104

Grief and Trauma

The Loss of Safety and the Assumptive World
Ritual Offers Symbolic Control

105

Ritual

- Invests the commonplace with uncommon meaning
- Gennep -- Liminal



106

Liminal



- “At the threshold”
- Between life and death
- But also between consciousness and unconsciousness

107

Role of Ritual in Public Tragedy



108

- Allows action at disorganized time
- Reaffirms community
- Shows solidarity with victims and survivors
- Structures public grief
- Reconstructs the narrative

Rituals of Intensification

- Emphasize the collective nature of the loss
- Stress the community of mourners
- Example – Memorial Service for 9/11



109

Spontaneous Ritual

- Can be local or non-local
- Allows a sense of participation or action
- Inclusive



110

Planned Rituals

- Value of personalization and participation
- The need for “translation” and multiple identities



111

Special Problems of Public Tragedy



- Private vs. public
- The role of media
- 9/11 – The problem of incomplete ritual
- Care of ritual leaders

112

Public Ritual

- The Need for Public Ritual
- Liminal – including between reaction and response



113

Ongoing Rituals Anniversary Rituals

- Validates grief
- Reframes event
- Reaffirms unity



114

Therapeutic Ritual

- Continuity
- Transition
- Reconciliation
- Affirmation



115

Rituals of Purification



- Rituals of purification can be used to mark transitions or serve as a ritual of reconciliation or transition

116

Memorialization

- A Sacred Space



117

Types of Memorials

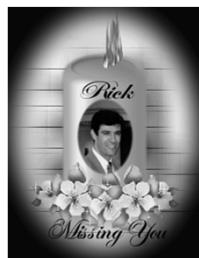
- Spontaneous
- Permanent
 - Meaning & Design (Dark Elegy & Pan Am Flight 103)
 - Setting
 - Can be divisive
- Virtual



118

Memorialization

- Memorialization has always used the newest technologies
- Now – living memorials – cyber presentations, DVD *Living Memorials*, and Memorial Web Pages



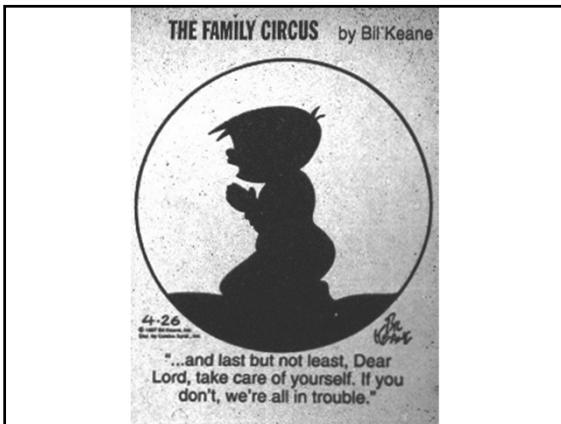
119

School Memorials *Lessons from Columbine*

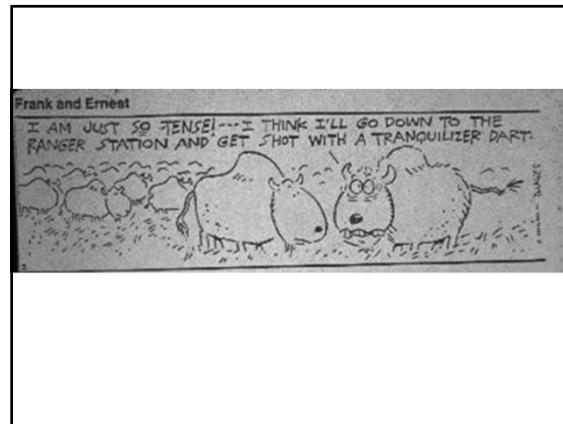
- It is a time-consuming process – allow time for consensus and compromise
 - Columbine opened the committee to all
 - In public space, need to have policies to cover the use of religious, political, or potentially offensive statements
 - Memorial placed so it could be visited rather than confronted
 - Columbine used a "pyramid" of priorities in evaluating designs – **all stakeholders**
 - Families of those killed
 - Injured and families
 - Students and faculty
 - Community
 - In another memorial, issue of perpetrators
- Bingham et. al., 2009



120



121



122

Principles of Self-Care



- Individual
 - Validation
 - Respite and Stress Management
 - Philosophy
 - Role
 - Spirituality
- Organizational
 - Education
 - Support
 - Ritual

123

Frank and Ernest

BEER 50¢

MY THERAPIST SAYS I SHOULD BE MY OWN BEST FRIEND, BUT I REFUSE TO LOWER MY STANDARDS THAT MUCH.

Copyright (c) 1996 by Thaves. Distributed from www.thecomics.com.

124