

# Traumatic Grief and Loss

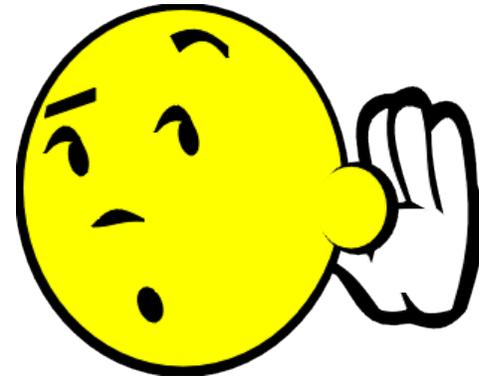


St. Louis CENTER FOR  
Family Development LLC

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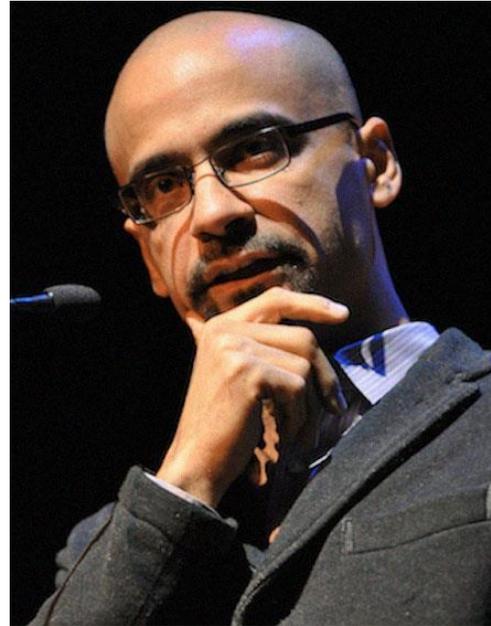
# Trauma Informed Training

- Creating Safety
- Transparency
- Choice and Control
- Collaborative
- Peer Support

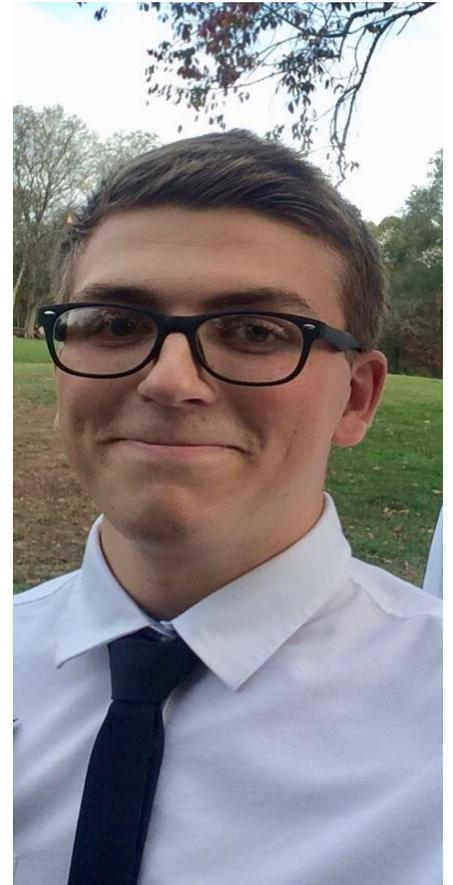


# The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma

- Junot Diaz
- Brian



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# Grief

- Types of grief (emotional distress following a death)
  - Traumatic (prolonged and interferes with functioning)
  - Invisible
  - Anticipatory
  - Ambiguous
  - Situational
- Cultural responses to grief (Mourning)
- Personal responses to grief
- Family grief
- Community grief



# Depression

- Name some core symptoms of depression
- How are they the same and different from grief?



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# What is trauma?



# Exercise

- With a partner:
  - Identify how you might interact with someone differently if you suspected that the person might be grieving.
    - Greeting
    - Demands and Expectations
    - Responses
  - How could you encourage others to consider the possibility of a grieving colleague, client, friend, relative, etc.?
  - How do you communicate respect for the process?
    - Expected timelines
    - Reassurance

# Conventional Grief

- Expected part of life
- Rituals
- Support
- Accommodations
- Cumulative



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# Typical Child Responses to Uncomplicated Grief

- Sad
- Sleep problems
- Loss of appetite
- Decreased interest in family and friends
- Increased complaints of physical discomfort (such as headaches or stomachaches)
- Regress / return to behaviors they had previously outgrown (such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, or clinging to parents)
- Irritability
- Do risky things
- Withdraw
- Trouble concentrating
- Think often about death
- Usually want to talk about the person who died
- Do things to remember the person
- Find comfort in thinking about the person
- Complete the following “tasks” of normal bereavement:
  - Accept the reality and permanence of the death
  - Experience and cope with the range of feelings about the person who died, such as sadness, anger, guilt, and appreciation
  - Adjust to changes in their lives and identity that result from the death
  - Develop new relationships or deepen existing relationships with friends and family
  - Invest in new relationships and life-affirming activities
  - Maintain a continuing, appropriate attachment to the person who died through such activities as reminiscing, remembering, and memorialization
  - Make some meaning of the death that can include coming to an understanding of why the person died
  - Continue through the normal developmental stages of childhood and adolescence.

# Traumatic Grief

- *A death is considered traumatic if it occurs without warning; if it is untimely; if it involves violence; if there is damage to the loved one's body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with the intent to harm; if the survivor regards the death as preventable; if the survivor believes that the loved one suffered; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as unfair and unjust."*
- Add circumstances in which the survivor witnessed the death, when their own life was threatened, and when the mourner experiences multiple deaths simultaneously.
- In addition to the nature of the death, other trauma risk factors include:
  - Having to make medical decisions about life support, organ donation, etc
  - Uncertainty about whether the person has died (ex. they are missing; unknown condition)
  - Media attention
  - Limited opportunities for social support
  - Being blamed for the death
  - Prolonged court proceedings
  - Having a prior history trauma

# Responses to Traumatic Grief

“You will experience physical and emotional symptoms beyond your control. Be prepared for them.” (unknown)

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Anger
- Guilt
- Acknowledgement
- Yearning
- Shattered Assumptions

# Symptoms of Traumatic Grief

- **Physical:** fatigue, exhaustion, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, digestive issues, headaches, nausea
- **Emotional:** fear, guilt, remorse, numbness, anxiety, depression, anger, helplessness, irritability, decreased frustration tolerance
- **Behavioral:** withdrawal, outbursts, hyper alert, suspiciousness, changes in activities
- **Cognitive:** flashbacks, difficulties with problem solving and decision making, amnesia, confusion, decreased concentration, memory disturbances
- **Spiritual:** betrayal, changes in life meaning, decreased sense of worthiness

# Grief Reactions Versus Trauma Reactions

## Conventional Grief

- Does not attack or disfigure our identity
- Guilt expresses regrets
- Dreams tend to be of the deceased
- Sadness is the generalized reaction
- Grief reactions stand alone
- Grief reactions are generally known to others
- Pain is related to the loss
  
- A child's anger is not usually destructive

## Trauma

- Changes our identity
- Guilt expresses self blame
- The client dies in the dreams
- Terror is the generalized reaction
- Reactions generally also include grief
- Trauma reactions are largely unknown to others
- Pain is related to the terror and overwhelming sense of powerlessness, as well as a fear for safety
  
- Anger often becomes assaultive in children

# Childhood Traumatic Grief Response

- Thinking or talking about the person who died often leads to thoughts of the traumatic manner of death.
- Children often try to avoid thinking or talking about the person who died and avoid facing the frightening feelings associated with these reminders.
- This prevents them from completing the tasks of normal bereavement.
- Childhood Traumatic Grief can affect children's development, relationships, achievement, and later effectiveness in life if not treated or otherwise resolved.

# Impact of Traumatic Grief and Loss

- Ability to Manage Emotions
- Sense of Safety
- Ability to Complete Mourning
- Wholeness
- Relationships
- Trust
- Meaning
- Self Esteem
- Letting Go of the Past (Before and After.....)
- Innocence / Childhood
- What Should Have Been and Wasn't
- Moral Clarity
- Purpose, Meaning, Joy in Life (Will to Live)

# Addressing Traumatic Grief

- Tip Sheets from NCTSN
  - [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//helping\\_school\\_age\\_children\\_with\\_traumatic\\_grief\\_caregivers.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//helping_school_age_children_with_traumatic_grief_caregivers.pdf)
  - [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//helping\\_youth\\_after\\_community\\_trauma\\_educators.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//helping_youth_after_community_trauma_educators.pdf)

# Client Vignette

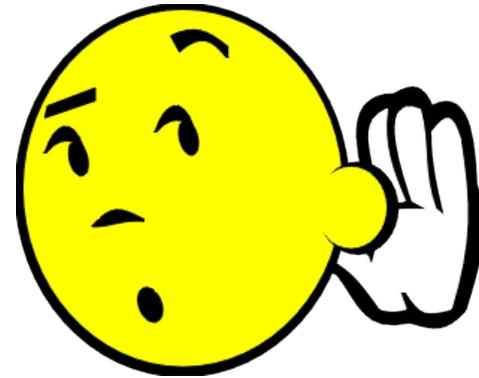
- Five months after a ten-year-old boy's father was killed in a car accident, he began waking up in the middle of the night in fright and spending the remainder of the night in his mother's bed. He was difficult to arouse in the morning and had trouble leaving the house for school. His grades began to slip, and he was uncooperative with the tutor his mother had obtained. He also refused to drive with anyone except his mother, creating a burden for her and making it difficult for him to go on outings with friends. He refused to allow his mother to display pictures of his father in the house. In this example, the boy would at first glance be fearful of separation from his mother.
- However, on further assessment it became clear that he was having nightmares in which he saw speeding cars and heard cars screeching. He also experienced panic in any car other than his mother's. Before his father's death, he and his father had begun working together on his science homework, creating various experiments and projects. This was the last thing they did together before his father left the house the night of the accident. Thus the boy became upset whenever he had to do his schoolwork with someone other than his father, as it led to reminders of the last time he saw his father before the crash. His functioning at home, at school, and with friends was suffering from the **intrusion of such traumatic symptoms**, and he was **unable to have happy memories of his father without thinking about the night of his death**.
- This boy is displaying several classic features of childhood traumatic grief. Rather than finding comfort from memories of his father, he is **avoiding such memories because for him they trigger memories of the traumatic way his father died**.
- He also avoids activities that are important to his ongoing development—such as doing homework and riding in friends' cars—because these also trigger traumatic memories. He is unable to work through the loss of his father and the pain associated with missing him, because he cannot tolerate any reminders of him, even seeing his picture. Thus, this boy is "stuck" due to the impingement of trauma symptoms on his ability to tolerate memories of his father and accomplish the tasks of normal grieving.

# Opportunities for Intervention

- Find a partner or small group
- According to your professional role, what are the options for you to support this child?
  - Give special consideration to
    - Emotional regulation
    - Stress management
- What resources do you need?
- What are the barriers for you to intervene?

# Trauma Informed Training

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# Tips for Everyone

- Be able / willing to talk and share when it is right for me.
- Predictability, routines, and structure are helpful.
- Reassure me that my experiences are normal.
- Provide me with some extra help to take care of myself.
- Be willing to listen attentively. Give me your whole attention.
- Allow me to be in control of when I talk about the grief and what I share.
- Don't make me do what is uncomfortable.
- Help me feel that I am not alone.
- Don't expect me to help you feel comfortable with my experiences.
- Help me find the joys in life when I am able and ready.

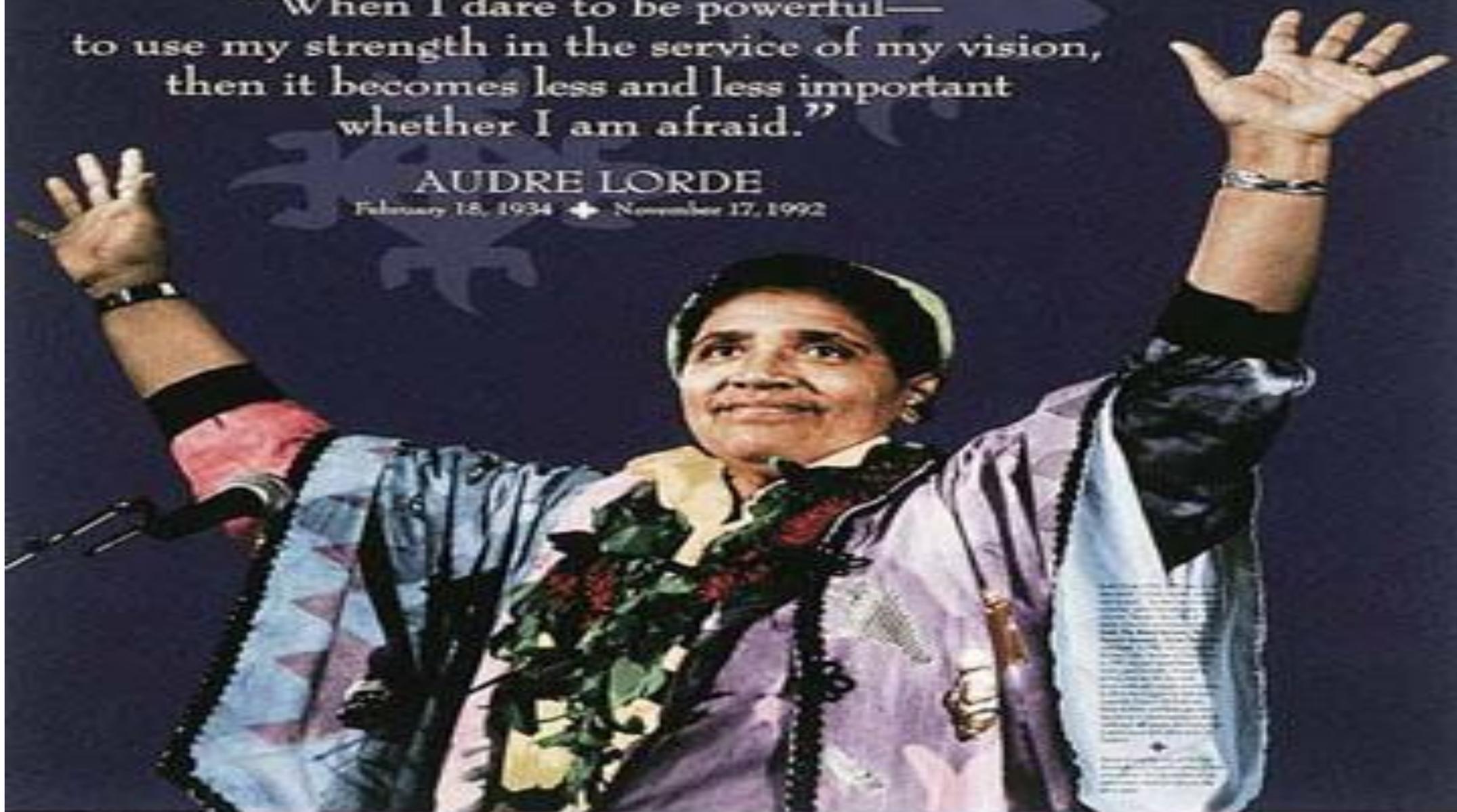
# Treatment Models

- Trauma Treatment Models
  - PTSD (Prolonged Exposure for Adolescents)
  - Attachment (Risking Connections)
  - Non-Suicidal Self Injury (DBT for Adolescents)
- TF-CBT
- EMDR
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Childhood Traumatic Grief (TG-CBT)
- Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention (5-7 sessions)

“When I dare to be powerful—  
to use my strength in the service of my vision,  
then it becomes less and less important  
whether I am afraid.”

AUDRE LORDE

February 18, 1934 — November 17, 1992



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