



BY Pallium Canada



## Session 6: “Dreaming of the Deceased (Person or Animal) Following a Loss”

Presenters: **Joshua Black, PhD**

Grief and Bereavement Researcher, Bereavement Initiative Manager at BCCPC, and Host of the Grief Dreams Podcast

Lived Experience Presenters: Sherry Landry and Kathy Wagner

**February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 12:00pm - 1:00pm via Zoom**

AGENDA ITEM	DISCUSSION
<p><b>Introduction &amp; Territory Acknowledgment</b></p>	<p><b>Grief &amp; Bereavement Literacy ECHO Series “Dreaming of the Deceased (Person or Animal) following a Loss”</b></p> <p><b>Presenter: Joshua Black</b></p> <p>Welcome to all participants, and introduction of the presenter, and presentation outline. Participants are notified the session is being recorded.</p>
<p><b>Overview Summary Presentation &amp; Discussion</b></p>	<p><b>Presentation Summary</b></p> <p>Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the central findings of academic research and dreams of the deceased.</li> <li>• Describe the issues the bereaved commonly voice in relation to dreams of the deceased.</li> <li>• Describe how dreams of the deceased can be a tool in supporting the bereaved.</li> </ul> <p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joshua started with the question ‘why should we care about dreams of the deceased’? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dreaming of the deceased is a common experience during bereavement.</li> <li>○ The bereaved have questions and concerns.</li> <li>○ Those who support them do not have understanding on the topic.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There are different forms of grief dreams after loss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dreams that do not have the deceased present or mention them.</li> <li>○ Dreams that do not have the deceased present, but others mention them.</li> <li>○ Dreams that have the deceased present in the dream.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Dreams of the deceased are common in adults and children.</li> <li>• Western dream research shows that dreams can reflect the dreamer’s waking life which is called the Continuity hypothesis. Dreams can be passive, or they can be active. Passive being that what you watch, how you feel during a day can be</li> </ul>

incorporated into your dreams. They also can be very active and can help problem solve some of the things one is actually working through.

- In general, research on dreams has found that as one's mood changes, the dreams also change. If one is in a very positive state and then it turns to a negative state, the dreams are going to correlate with that change.
- People on average will have more negative dreams just because a lot of times we go to bed anxious just with everything that goes on and everyday life. What was found also is that after trauma, one's dream becomes even more consistently negative.
- When dreaming of the deceased, it is common to have positive themed and negative themed dreams. It does seem more common though to have positive themed dreams.
- From Joshua's personal research, post-traumatic symptoms, and unresolved feelings of guilt and blame had an impact on those dreams of the deceased being negative. A lot can be learnt from these negative dreams through what our mind is trying to work through.
- Dream recall has been the most important factor in understanding who dreams of the deceased. People who dream in general more are more likely to remember these dreams of the deceased. In turn, people are probably dreaming of the deceased more than they're probably actually remembering them.
- Dreams can help with the grieving process in different ways. Trauma recovery is one of them, emotion regulation, and also grief support. And one of the ways that it can happen is that it allows for these continuing bonds to be present.
- Continuing bond is when the bereaved continues to develop a bond with the deceased. That sort of relationship has been shown to help in grief recovery. These dreams can be very powerful. They can provide advice. It can also help restore faith in one's religion or spiritual beliefs and a lot of times one of the most important ones noticeable across cultures is being in the presence of love. Sometimes these dreams help reduce some guilt that one may be carrying.
- There are differences noticed in dream themes of the deceased based on who died or how they died.
- Dream content in dreams of the deceased can change over time to reflect what we are dealing with.
- For the cultural and religious perspectives – there is this conflict with people having very different perspectives on these dreams. It's always great to know where someone is when they share these dreams and their perspectives. Just like with the Buddhist culture, some people believe that if you have a dream of the deceased, it may be a sign that they have not reincarnated and that can be a negative thing for them. This is even if they're saying very loving words. These dreams can have profound effects on their belief system.
- 4 steps to support: give permission to talk about it, normalize and validate, ask questions on the experience (don't interpret), and thank them for sharing.

#### **Questions/discussion**

**Q:** Where can one find other resources to know more about this topic?

**A:** To learn more about the topic, visit [Joshua's website](#) as there are FAQ's.

<p><b>Lived experience presenters</b></p>	<p><b>Lived experience presenters: Sherry Landry &amp; Kathy Wagner</b></p> <p>Sherry and Kathy shared their loss stories and how dreams sort of played a role within their grieving process.</p> <p><b>Sherry:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sherry experienced the loss of her brother in 2019. They were very close and had the usual brother and sister squabbles but forgave each other. Three years before he passed, they had a little falling out which was minor. They forgave each other and got over it, but in the back of her head that was a guilt she felt.</li> <li>• She arrived one day to his house and had a dream- He was there on top of the stairs saying: ‘Come, Come on in, sister. You know where you can stay, you know where your room is. And then her niece said- kids in the basement, adults upstairs.</li> <li>• It is amazing how that has given her so much comfort and realizing that dreams can serve as a life tool that we have to carry around in our bag of medicine of life.</li> <li>• When she tries to go to bed, she remembers the words of her grandmother; say thank you 3 times before you go to sleep, that's where you go to sleep at peace. And when you're peaceful, that's when you dream.</li> <li>• She had never felt so much comfort in her life the way she did the night she spent with her brothers. She shared her dream with her children that night and even his wife. And that night, they all slept well.</li> </ul> <p><b>Kathy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kathy’s primary grief was related to the death of her son who was 21 years old when he passed in 2017.</li> <li>• It was a drug related death, so it was sudden and traumatic. There is that added layer of stigma that makes it much harder to talk about and therefore one internalizes it which can come out in dreams.</li> <li>• Kathy experienced several different types of dreams and some of them in the positive category and some were in the negative category. There were learnings that she took away from all of them and she also experienced a kind of life changing perspective shift.</li> <li>• When she found out that her son had passed, like in the first few days after he passed, she remembers hearing through her children that their dad who she is no longer married to had experienced her son coming to him in his dreams. There was this feeling of jealousy she experienced like why didn’t he appear to her? And a few days after that, she had her first visitation, which felt very different from any other kind of dream where her son came to her.</li> <li>• He was very physical. Like she could touch, smell and hold him. That was her first visitation dream. Earlier on in the coming months after his death particularly up to the first year she also experienced a number of nightmares and she does not consider them as visitations. She is absolutely convinced that was her working through the trauma associated not just with his death but with his life as he was experiencing addiction. They were terrible and she’s not had one of those dreams for sometime, probably a few years now, which again kind of confirms that was her working through some stuff.</li> <li>• As part of her grieving process and very much part of her healing process, she wrote a book titled <b>Here with You: A Memoir of Love, Family and Addiction</b>.</li> <li>• It was her first Christmas without her son, so it was a pretty stressful time. A few days after Christmas, she had a dream where she was searching for her son in a crack house, trying to find him to bring him back to recovery to save him. She knew if she</li> </ul>
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	<p>didn't find him soon, he would die. Only she knew where he was, so it was all on her. In her dream, the crack host looked like a party scene from Breaking Bad, emaciated bodies lying amidst garbage, people shooting up or half-heartedly having sex or just staring at her with vacant eyes. She walked over these bodies desperately searching for her son. She stumbled from room to room growing more panicked with every second until she finally found him. She reached out to where he lay in a corner of the room, his eyes gazing lifelessly at her, his body already cold, pain exploding in her, and she woke up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What scared her most was the feeling of deep relief she had when she woke and remembered her son was dead. She felt anguish and guilt for being relieved and spent most of that day in bed crying, feeling like a terrible mother.</li> <li>• Some things seemed easier now than when her son was in the depths of his addiction. It was easy for her to manage her own pain than to watch him in pain. But that wasn't what her relief had been about. It made sense to her in a way to be relieved that she didn't have to fear for him or try to save him anymore. But that wasn't quite right either. All day she wrestled with that feeling of relief until she finally understood it. She hadn't been relieved that her son was dead in her dream. She had been relieved when she awoke that she didn't have to live through his death again. That she hadn't somehow been swept back to that moment of his death. Instead, she is here months later, still in a sea of pain, but inching her way toward an unknown shore. That was a legitimate relief!</li> </ul> <p><b>Final conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our dreams are one of the ways in which we work things out, whether we remember them or not which can absolutely be healing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session Materials and Additional Resources</b></p>	<p><b>Resources shared during the session:</b></p> <p><b>Session Recording</b> is uploaded on the BCCPC's YouTube page: <a href="#">HERE</a></p> <p><a href="#">Dr. Joshua Black's podcast's website</a></p> <p>Action plan link</p> <p><a href="https://www.bc-cpc.ca/about-us/activities/new-projects/bereavement-study/grief-and-bereavement-support-in-bc-a-collaborative-improvement-action-plan/">https://www.bc-cpc.ca/about-us/activities/new-projects/bereavement-study/grief-and-bereavement-support-in-bc-a-collaborative-improvement-action-plan/</a></p>
<p><b>Closing</b></p>	<p><b>Next ECHO Grief &amp; Bereavement Literacy Series:</b></p> <p>Zoom Registration for next Grief &amp; Bereavement Literacy ECHO session:</p> <p><b>Sleep After Loss</b>  <b>March 19, 2024 12pm-1pm (PST)</b>  <a href="#">Registration link</a></p> <p>Past sessions in this series can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>

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