

From Reaction to Learning: Considering the Impacts of COVID-19 as a Community-Level Trauma

Emma Ansara, RN, MS, MA, FNP-C | July, 2022

Let's get to know you!

From where in New York are you joining us?

What BWIAH program(s) are you representing?

What is your primary role at your work site?

What drew you to this session?

Emma Ansara RN, MS, MA, FNP-C
(she/her)
JSI Senior Clinical Consultant

A little about me



Learning objectives

- Define community-level trauma and moral suffering and why these concepts are important for reflecting on past and current events (such as COVID)
- Better understand the way in which trauma may impact our ability to maintain compassion in the face of our work
- Describe how reflection and the processing of past events can be a strategy for increasing resilience
- Explore opportunities to reframe community-level traumatic events to identify positive lessons learned

Safety & Transparency

- Safety
- Options for participation
- Reflection(s)

Today's session is a model of one type of response to responding organizationally to this moment.



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Community Level-Trauma

Community-Level Trauma

Trauma experienced by community members in aggregate or an event that impacts a few people but has structural and socially traumatic consequences.

(Pinderhughes, Davis & Williams, 2015)

Current examples of Community-Level Trauma

- COVID-19
- Police killings and violence towards black and brown people
- Environmental disasters (forest fires, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, ice storms)
- School/mass shootings
- War



Community-Level Trauma within Reproductive Health

- Racial inequities in maternal mortality
- Forced sterilization for refugees detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
- Anti-Trans legislation within states

(Bouranova, 2022; Gingrey & Phillip, 2020)

Community Level Trauma: COVID-19



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Concurrent & anticipatory grief

Individuals
Milestones

Prolonged uncertainty

Magnitude
Duration
Effects

Concerns about preparedness

Personal
Organization
Public

Lack of needed supplies

PPE, equipment, tests,
vaccines

Potential threats

To Self
To Loved ones
To Co-workers

Unevenness

Across race/class/gender

(Mack, 2020)

Reflection: Community-level trauma

What are examples of community level trauma that may have impacted your community(s)?

Community Level Trauma: Thinking Syndemically



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- Uneven impact of the virus
- Infectious disease that interacts with chronic diseases in the context of significant social inequality

*This moment demands a reckoning with
historical racism and politicization of science.*

(Horton, 2020)



Effects of “Staying at Home”

- Negative mental health correlates to social distancing
- Response to COVID has emphasized a separation of physical and emotional health
- Clinically this presents as:
 - Increased depression/anxiety (especially for adolescents)
 - Increased rates of substance use (including death by overdose)
 - Increased rates of intimate partner violence (IPV)

(Marroquin, Vine, & Morgan, 2020; Murthy, 2021; Peitzmeier et al. 2021)



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Moral Suffering

Moral Suffering

The harm we experience when we participate or are exposed to actions that transgress our tenets of basic human goodness

(Halifax, 2020)

Moral Suffering: A Complex Landscape

Moral distress:

aware of moral problem, determine a remedy, but unable to act upon that due to internal/ external constraints

Moral injury:

psychological impact that is felt by those witnessing or participating in morally transgressive acts (leading to dread, guilt, shame)

Moral outrage:

externalized expression of indignation directed towards those who have violated social norms (episodically valuable, chronically detrimental)

Moral apathy:

not caring or active denial about morally transgressive acts

Reflection: Impacts of trauma

1. What have been the organizational wide traumas experienced by your organization?
2. How did COVID compound pre-existing stressors?
3. How do you see these traumas show up most significantly in your work?



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Mediating Stress

Mediating Factors for Stress



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- **Predictability:** anticipating what might be coming next
- **Control:** perception that one can influence outcome/next events
- **Outlets** for frustration: opportunities for expression of negative emotion (displaced anger)
- **Interpretation of the stressor:** making meaning/sense of trauma
- **Social support:** sharing with others as a means of making sense, finding comfort



Relationships as resilience

Thupten Jinpa, PhD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLMUpedTQ5Q&list=PLWXu8EHZjBYoujTb4kBvNU8bhzNIFvEzV&index=9&t=0s>

42:00-45:40



Relational Orientation to Community-Level Trauma

- Maintaining compassion depends on relationship to joy (distinct from pleasure)
- Experiencing vulnerability through relationships/connectedness is an important facet of maintaining compassion to oneself and others

Compassion



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- Capacity to attend to the experience of others
- Feeling of concern for others
- Sense of what will serve others
- Opportunity to act in service of others

(Halifax, 2020)



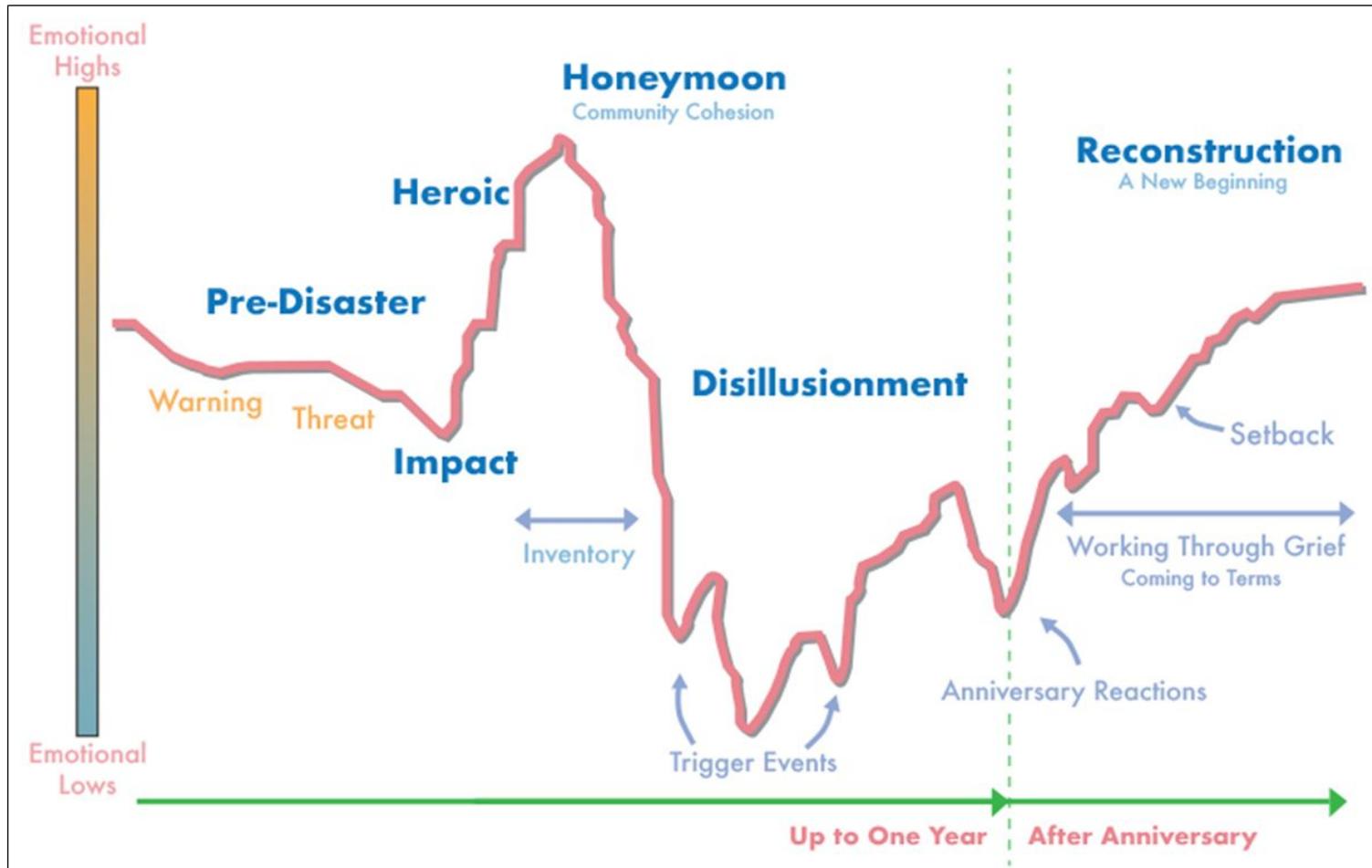
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Putting this into practice: Time

Time

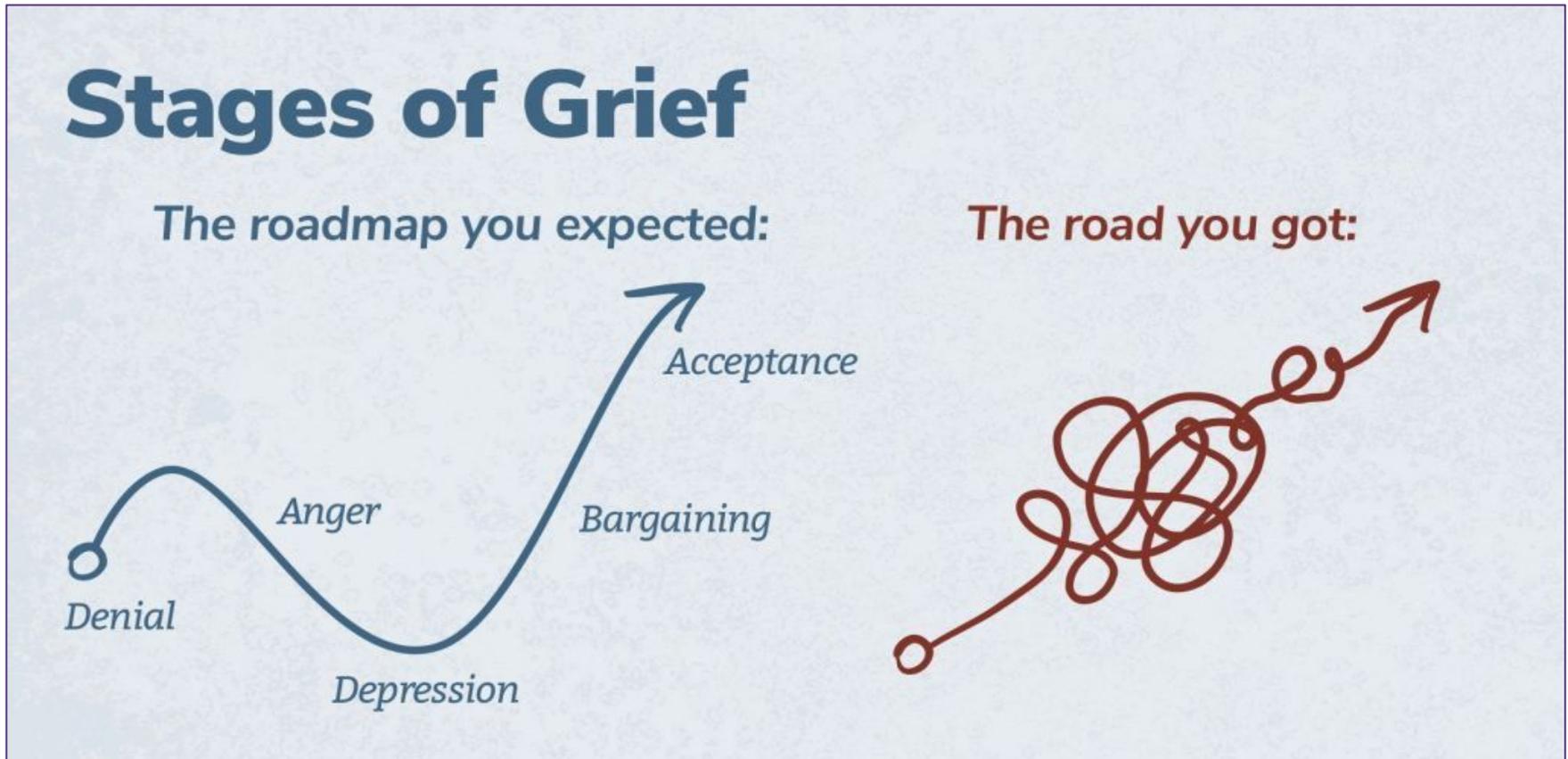


Phases Following Disaster



Timing

Stages of Grief



(Image [source](#))

Time & Space for Connection

- Town halls
- Circles of Caring (virtual support groups)
- Interdisciplinary team meetings (Schwartz Rounds)
- 1:1 supervision (accommodating porous boundaries)

(Dohrn et al. 2021; Taylor et al. 2018)



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Putting this into practice: Re-framing

Reflection: Re-framing

1. What are you collectively able to do now at your organization/agency/clinic that you never thought you could do prior to the pandemic?
2. What are the ways of working that you hope to carry forward?
3. What are ways of working that were not productive and you could consider letting go of?

Mediating Factors for Stress



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- ✓ **Predictability:** anticipating what might be coming next
- ✓ **Control:** perception that one can influence outcome/next events
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Recap

Establishing shared language/concepts

- Community level trauma
- Moral distress
- Compassion

Strategies to address

- Relational orientation to resilience
- Considering the role of time/timing
- Reframing

Reflection: Opportunities for Action

How could you bring what we discussed today back to your workplace?



Q&A

Any observations/
experiences/
questions you
would like to share?



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Contact the New York State Family Planning Training Center |
nysfptraining@jsi.com

Contact Emma Ansara | emma_ansara@jsi.com

Thank you!

Resources

Cultivating Compassion When Working with Others (G.R.A.C.E.):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWLmnHB4rLY>

Emotional Well-Being During the COVID-19 Crisis for Health Care Providers Webinar Series:

<https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/coronavirus/webinars>

On the Front Lines: Compassion-Based Strategies with Thupten Jinpa, PhD:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLMUpedTQ5Q&list=PLWXu8EHZjBYoujTb4kBvNU8bhzNIFvEzV&index=9&t=0s> (Specifically: 42:30–45:40)

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