

The Mental Health Needs of Cancer Survivors

Breast Cancer Resource Center Provider Forum
February 25, 2022

R. Garrett Key MD FAPA FACLP
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychiatry



The University of Texas at Austin
Dell Medical School



Seton

GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION



Disclosure

I have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the content of this presentation

I may discuss off label uses of medications for uses that have not been approved by the FDA



The next hour...

- Common terms
- Depression and anxiety
- Specific concerns of cancer survivors
- Resources for your patients



Psyche by Paul Alfred de
Curzon ca. 1848

Psychiatry is the branch of neuroscience concerned with our ability to create and sustain meaningful connections.



What is a survivor?

A cancer survivor is anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer and is living.



What is coping?

The application of thoughts and behaviors to manage distress.





Distress that interferes in effective coping becomes disorder.

- Distress – unpleasant psychosocial experiences
- Depression – illness behavior out of proportion to known illness
- Pathologic Anxiety – overestimation of a threat or underestimation of ability to confront it



Isn't some depression normal after a big loss?

- Depression
 - Isolation
 - Guilt and regret
 - Self criticism
 - Constant
 - Hopelessness
 - Loss of interest
 - Earnest suicidal thoughts
- Sadness/Grief
 - Feeling of connection
 - Self integrity
 - Self-worth
 - Intermittent
 - Hope persists
 - Intact drive
 - Future oriented



Neurovegetative symptoms can be misleading.

- **Sleep**
- Interest
- Guilt
- **Energy**
- **Cognition/Concentration**
- **Appetite**
- **Psychomotor agitation or retardation**
- Suicidal thoughts

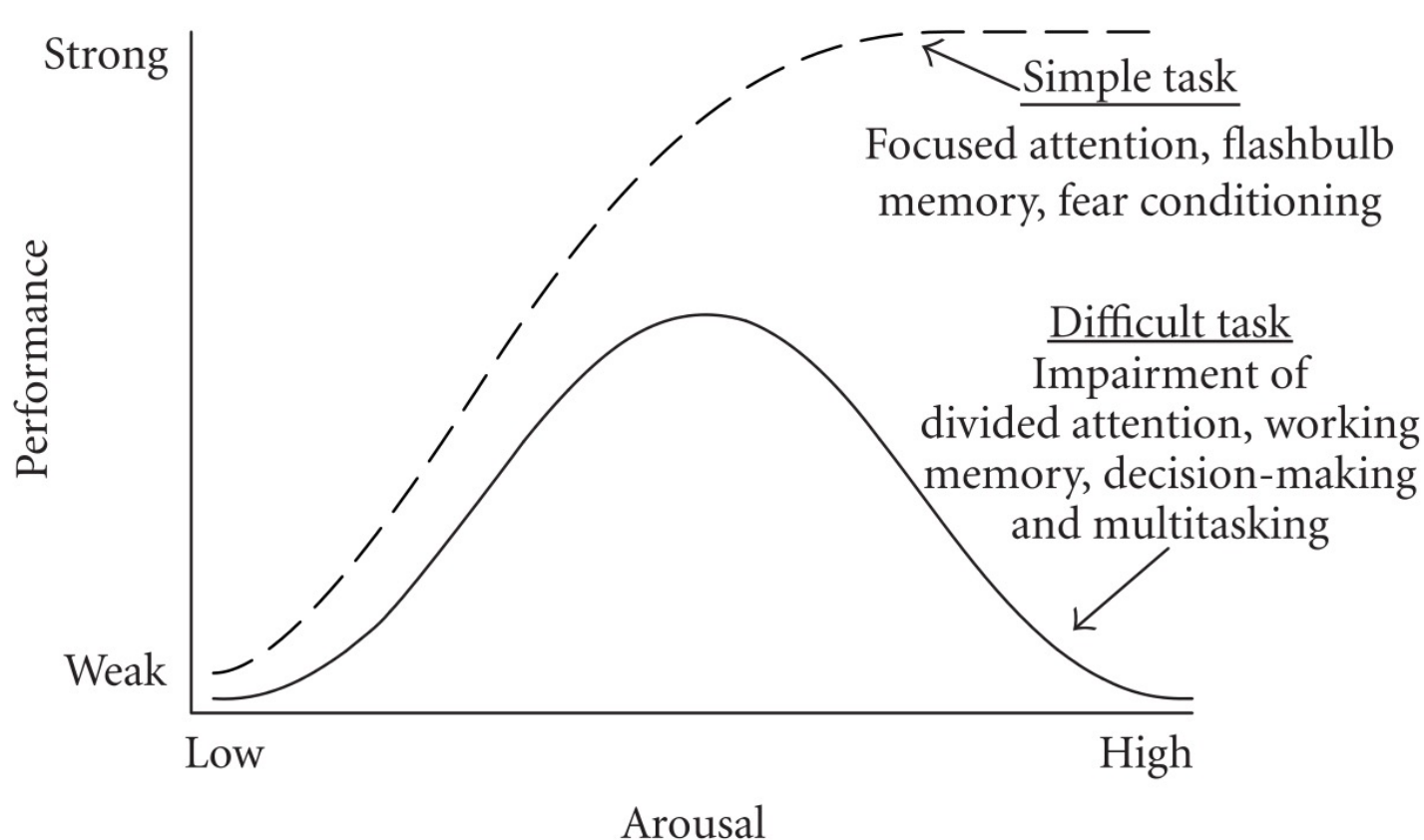


Focus on psychosocial symptoms to diagnose depression.

- Sleep
- **Interest**
- **Guilt**
- Energy
- Cognition/Concentration
- Appetite
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation
- **Suicidal thoughts**



What is anxiety?



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Yerkes and Dodson 1908 - Diamond DM, et al. (2007). "The Temporal Dynamics Model of Emotional Memory Processing: A Synthesis on the Neurobiological Basis of Stress-Induced Amnesia, Flashbulb and Traumatic Memories, and the Yerkes-Dodson Law". Neural Plasticity: 33. doi:10.1155/2007/60803. [PMID 17641736](#).



An overactive approach/avoid response is problematic.

- Irritability
- Blunted emotions
- Pervasive worrying
- Inability to relax
- Panic attacks





Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

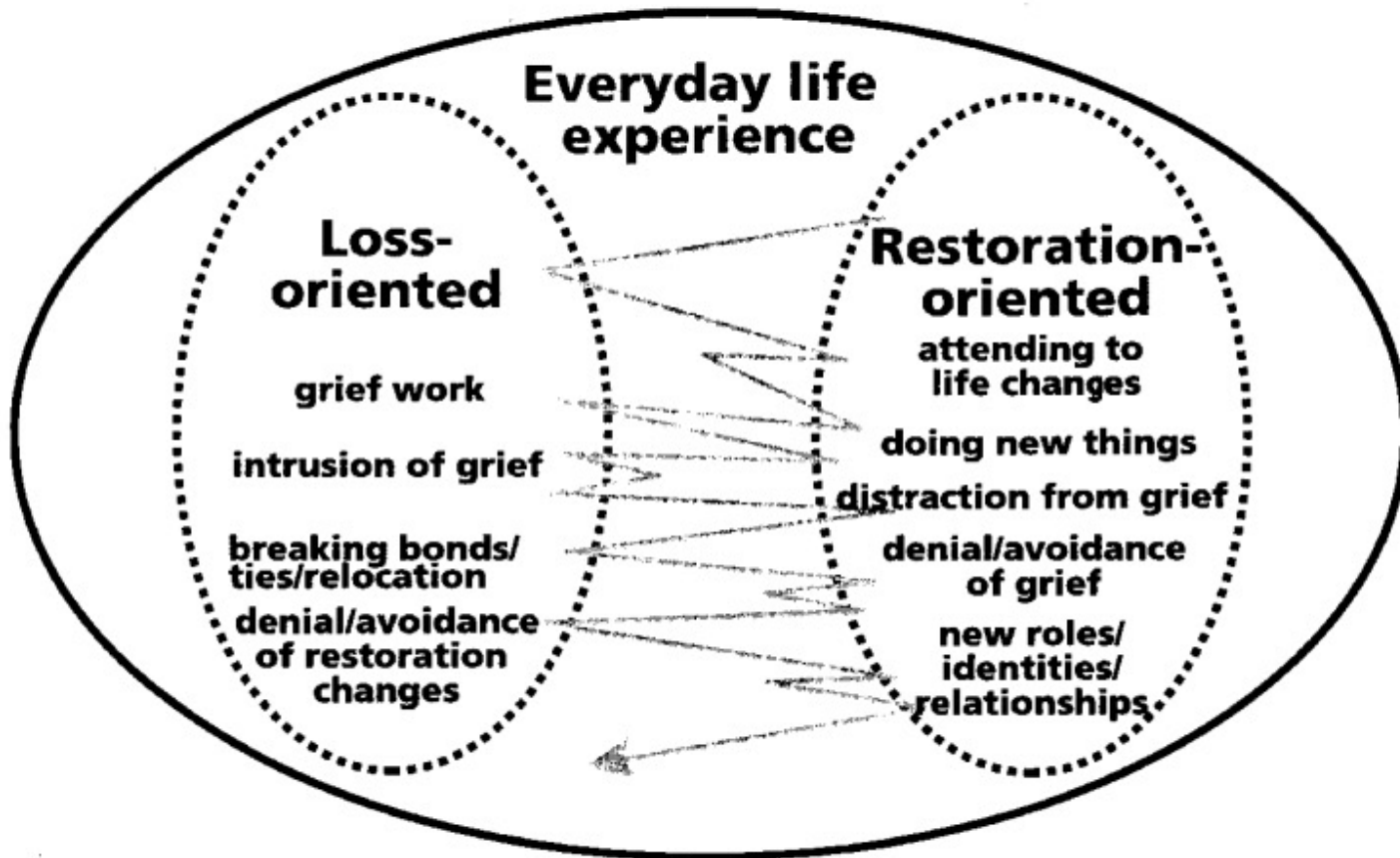


FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.



You can separate problematic distress into three categories.

- Exacerbation of preexisting disorders
 - Anxiety and depressive disorders, mostly
- Adjustment disorders
 - Stressors overwhelming coping capacity
- Acquired new disorders
 - PTSD, adapting to anatomical changes



There are common themes for survivors.

- Fear of recurrence/death
- Treatment vacuum
- Isolation and socialization
- Adaptation to deficits
- Body changes
- Chronic pain or other disability
- COVID



Young adult survivors have different needs.

- Few peers
- Interruption of development arc
- Reproductive concerns
- When do you disclose your status?



You are mental health providers.

- Ego supportive, validating exploration of concerns
- Normalizing distress
- Ask directly about psychiatric symptoms
- Thoughtful discussions around suicidal thinking



There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy. All other questions follow from that.

Albert Camus





Thoughts of suicide or death are not always cause for alarm.

- Preserve sense of control
- Protection from uncontrolled suffering
- Evidence of coping breakdown (sometimes)
- Thoughts and plans are very different
- MAiD/PAD is legal in parts of the US

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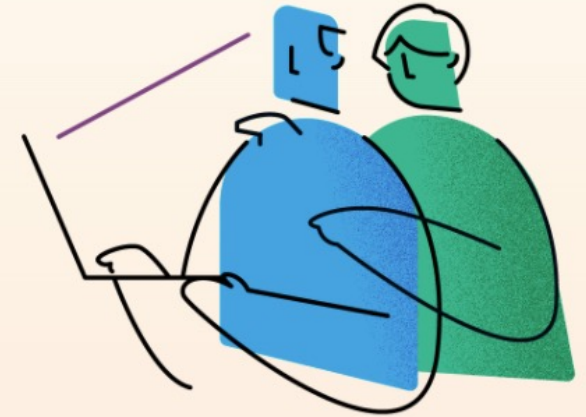
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Understanding and discussing topics like [advance directives](#), [palliative care](#), [caregiving](#) and [hospice care](#) may feel overwhelming on top of dealing with a serious or life-limiting illness. Our [guides](#) and [resources](#) are here to help you through the journey you are on and to aid you in understanding the choices you have.



You need help now. You or your loved one has a serious illness.



What's the difference between hospice and palliative care?



What do you need to do to create an advance directive?

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Resources



You are not alone. There are many resources in your community to help black women find information about breast cancer, treatment, support, and networking.

When you begin on your journey of being diagnosed, use these resources to find information before, during, and after your treatments. Knowing more about resources that are available can help you be a better patient. You don't have to struggle alone.

Resources: Local and National

- [After Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)
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- [Beyond the Shock](#)
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Every man thinketh his
burden is the heaviest

But who feels it knows it,
Lord.

The Wailers





“We must take a good hard look at our own attitudes towards death and dying before we can sit quietly and without anxiety next to a terminally ill patient.”



Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



Thoughts or questions?

