

What we Need is a Strategy for Resilience – What's That?

Recently, Trust for America's Health (TFAH) and Well Being Trust (WBT) published a report entitled "Pain in the Nation – The Drug, Alcohol and Suicide Epidemics and the Need for a National Resilience Strategy." The report – including a 16-page Executive Summary and other materials – can be found at <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/paininthenation/>. It is a sobering report – for those in the field of Public Health; for those who have suffered loss due to those causes; and for those of us engaged in the field of Grief Recovery. The report describes the epidemics of these three causes – sharing that over 1 million deaths have occurred from these causes between 2006 and 2015. More concerning though, they provide projections for those conditions in the next decade – by 2025. And those numbers are staggering – with perhaps twice as many – 2 million deaths - estimated to occur. They refer to these as "deaths of desperation" and it's the epidemic of our times. The data are provided nationally and by state – check them out!

They call it desperation. We call it grief. And it's not new.... It's just growing, growing at a faster pace than ever before. Growing among all parts of our population – young, old, urban, rural, those with means, and those with not so many means, people from the east coast, the west, south, midwest, mountains and plains.

In addition to providing the data and making these projections and naming the epidemic, the authors also provide recommendations, summarizing those as the "need for a national resilience strategy." We hear a lot about these causes of death – these days, especially the opioid crisis and the underlying hopelessness that leads many to these addictions. And we hear that millions of dollars are on the way to help stem the epidemic. But listen closely to these reports – mostly what they propose supporting is additional access to treatment, more access to Naloxone, more restrictions or limitations on providers as they prescribe these types of medication.

Listen intently when you hear about how these dollars will be spent. What is conspicuously absent is talk about Prevention – real, primary, "up-stream" prevention. Why? Because treatment, though costly, is easier than prevention. Really? Yes – think about how hard it is to lose weight – vs just treating the outcomes of our obesity – sure – we pay for that treatment – but all too often, we continue to eat – the behavior that puts us in the sick state – and we continue paying for treatment, often to no avail.

So how does this apply to Grief? And why a strategy for Resilience?

Because Resilience is Prevention. As we know – change and loss will always happen – and grief is the natural and normal reaction to those changes and losses. If we are to survive, we therefore must be able to withstand these changes and loss and our Grief Recovery skills will help us survive them – not once but on an ongoing basis. And that's resilience.

These deaths of desperation are really deaths due to unresolved grief. The factors cited – alcohol, drugs and suicide - we know as STERBs – Short-Term, Energy-Relieving Behaviors. Yes, even suicide can be considered a STERB.... Just one that comes with a very long-term consequence. So, the TFAH and WBT report is all about our field – Grief – and what they're recommending – without their knowing it – is a national strategy for Grief Recovery.

TFAH and WBT call it resilience – that’s the language of Public Health and also the language of the American Psychological Association. So, what does resilience mean – and does Grief Recovery really teach resilience?

According to the dictionary – resilience is defined as the capacity to recover from difficulties; toughness. Another definition – the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. And yet another – the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc, after being bent, compressed or stretched. The American Psychological Association defines it as an adaptation in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or stress; family/relationship problems, health problems, or workplace/money issues. Even the Harvard Business Review defines it as the ability to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change and keep going in the face of adversity. And in the lay press – Psychology Today defines it as the ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes.

What behavior did you NOT see in any of those definitions? **STRONG** – Being strong is NOT resilience. In fact, in the Psychology Today description – strength is a result of resilience – coming back stronger....

What words ARE found in those definitions – **Recover** – or Recovery – that’s what Grief Recovery teaches – how to recover. **Ability** – skills, tools, things we’re able to learn/do – that’s what Grief Recovery teaches – new skills that give us new abilities to recover. **Difficulties, misfortune, change, adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, stress, problems, failure** - a lot of words – but we know them all as Grief – in the broadest terms – all grief. **Ineffable quality** – the purpose of the Grief Recovery Method is to “transform the quality of our lives.” And we know it does – we’ve seen it work – we’ve been the beneficiaries of seeing it work. **Power** – to return to the original form after being bent, compressed or stretched.... Grievers often feel powerless over their grief, their situations. But learning the Grief Recovery skills is empowering! They learn to make choices – not in what happened to them in the past, but in how they respond to it today -and going forward. Recovery – resilience – is powerful!

So – what the authors have identified as being needed to stem the epidemic of “deaths of desperation” is a national strategy for Grief Recovery. They just didn’t call it that – they just might not have known (yet!) that such an intervention exists and in fact, comes already prepared with an easily accessible, community-based, decades-proven, educational format and program, and thousands of trained, Certified Grief Recovery Specialists located in cities, towns, and villages all across our nation. The Recovery/Resilience professionals are already out there – waiting and ready to be enlisted in this national strategy. In fact, they’re all over the world!

The tools we bring – come in two basic forms. The Grief Recovery Method is like treatment for those already struggling through their desperation/grief. And once “treated” grievers are equipped with new tools and skills that can give them the ability to both recover from those losses that brought them to the program, but also to use in the face of future losses/changes. This too is found most prominently in the Psychology Today definition – when they say that “they rise from the ashes,” and the Harvard Business Review when they state that those who are resilient – or recovered – find ways to “adapt well to change and **keep going** in the face of adversity.” Even there – the Grief Recovery Method agrees – in that it can give people the ability to “**move beyond** death, divorce and other losses.”

Best yet however, is the second tool we bring – in the form of the When Children Grieve program – this is like prevention – PREVENTION – exactly what the TFAH article says is most needed – prevention of these deaths of desperation – primary prevention – upstream – to prevent the need for treatment, or at least such drastic treatment. Think about it – if we could teach all of our children and youth better ways to deal with change, adversity, loss, stress, trauma, setbacks, death, divorce, workplace/money issues, family/relationship problems... call it what you like – but just call it grief – then we would be teaching them not just “resilience” skills – but RECOVERY skills! And in so doing – we could begin to turn the tide – and perhaps reduce that projected trend toward 2 million deaths of desperation by 2025.

Resilience does not mean “being strong for others” or being strong for ourselves... it means adapting, learning skills that will help us achieve the ability to recover; to restore our ability to transform the quality of our lives, so that we can keep going – to be able to move beyond the changes and losses that occur in our lives.

Resilience means Recovery!

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