



# CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Defining death and life/death issues
- Death and sociohistorical, cultural contexts
- Facing one's own death
- Coping with the death of someone else

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- Over the years, determining death has become more complex
- **Brain death**
  - All electrical activity of brain has ceased for a specified period of time
  - Flat EEG reading
- Most physicians include higher cortical functions and lower brain stem functions
- Some supporters of adopting cortical death policy

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- **Advance care planning**
  - Patient communicates preference for end-of-life care
- All 50 states accept an advance directive, such as *living will*
  - Legal document specifies whether life-sustaining procedures should be used to prolong life
- Physicians Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)
  - Translates treatment preferences into medical orders
  - Involves health care professionals in advance care planning

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- **Euthanasia**
  - Painless ending of life of those suffering from incurable disease or severe disability
  - **Passive euthanasia** – withholding treatment
  - **Active euthanasia** – death is deliberately induced
- Assisted suicide
  - Legal in 4 European countries
  - No official U.S. policy, decision left up to each state
- Notable cases – Terri Schiavo, Jack Kevorkian

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- Death in America
  - Scientific advances to delay the inevitable
  - Lack of training in adequate end of life care or its importance
  - “*Good death*” – involves physical comfort, support from loved ones, and appropriate medical care
- **Hospice**
  - Program committed to making end of life as free from pain, anxiety, and depression as possible
  - Emphasis on **palliative care** – reduced pain and suffering, helping die with dignity
  - Goals contrast with hospital care

# DEATH AND SOCIOHISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- Changing historical circumstances
  - Older adults account for approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of deaths in U.S.
    - Perspectives on death, dying, grieving based on older adults
  - Location of death
    - More than 80% of deaths occur in institutions or hospitals
  - Care for the dying
    - Shifted away from the family
    - Minimized exposure to death

# DEATH AND SOCIOHISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- Death in different cultures
  - Cultural variations in the experience of, and attitudes about, death
    - Various philosophical or religious beliefs about death, rituals surrounding death
  - In most societies, death is not viewed as the end of existence
    - Spirit is believed to live on
- Americans as death avoiders and death deniers
  - Funeral industry glosses over death, fashions lifelike qualities of dead
  - Endless search for the “fountain of youth”
  - Rejection and isolation of the elderly

# FACING ONE'S OWN DEATH

- Kübler-Ross' stages of dying
  - **Denial and isolation:** Person denies that death is really going to take place
  - **Anger:** Person recognizes that denial can no longer be maintained
  - **Bargaining:** Person develops the hope that death can be postponed or delayed
  - **Depression:** Dying person comes to realize the certainty of death
  - **Acceptance:** Person develops a sense of peace, an acceptance of one's fate, and in many cases, a desire to be left alone

# FIGURE 17.2 - KÜBLER-ROSS' STAGES OF DYING

Copyright © McGraw-Hill Education. Permission required for reproduction or display.



© Eastcott/Momatiuk/The Image Works.

# FACING ONE'S OWN DEATH

- Perceived control may be an adaptive strategy for remaining alert and cheerful
- Denial insulates and allows one to avoid coping with intense feelings of anger and hurt
  - Can be maladaptive depending on extent

# COMMUNICATING WITH A DYING PERSON

- Psychologists support open awareness for dying individual
  - Significant others should know their loved one is dying as well
- Importance of open communication with a dying person:
  - Can close their lives in accord with their own ideas about proper dying
  - May be able to complete plans and projects, make arrangements and decisions
  - Opportunity to reminisce and converse with others
  - Better understanding of what is happening to them

# GRIEVING

- **Grief**
  - Emotional numbness, disbelief, separation anxiety, despair, sadness, and loneliness that accompany the loss of someone we love
  - Feelings occur repeatedly shortly after a loss, become more manageable over time
- Most survivors experience normal or uncomplicated grief reactions
  - **Complicated grief/prolonged grief disorder** includes enduring and unresolved despair over an extended period of time
  - *Disenfranchised grief* – socially ambiguous loss that cannot be openly mourned or supported

# GRIEVING

- Coping and type of death
  - Impact of death on surviving individuals is strongly influenced by the circumstances under which the death occurs
  - Sudden deaths are likely to have more intense and prolonged effects on surviving individuals
  - Death of a child can be especially difficult for parents

# MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD

- Grieving stimulates individuals to try to make sense of their world
- Reliving of the events leading to the death, shared memories, reminiscing among family members are common experiences
- When a death is caused by an accident or a disaster, the effort to make sense of it is often pursued more vigorously

# LOSING A LIFE PARTNER

- Death of an intimate partner brings profound grief
  - In U.S., 13% of men and 40% of women ages 65+ were widowed
  - Financial loss, loneliness, increased physical illness, psychological disorders, including depression, often experienced
- Social support helps to adjust to death of a spouse
  - Widow-to-Widow program provides support for newly widowed women
  - Adopted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and numerous community organizations

# FORMS OF MOURNING

- Significant increase in cremation
  - In U.S., approximately 42% of deaths followed by cremation
- Funerals are an important aspect of mourning in many cultures
  - Critics claim exploitation in the funeral industry
- Cultures vary in how they practice mourning
  - Family and community may have important roles in mourning process