



# ESSENTIALS OF LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENT JOHN W. SANTROCK

3e

DEATH, DYING, AND GRIEVING

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# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- Determining death
  - **Brain death:** A person is brain dead when all electrical activity of the brain has ceased for a specified period of time
    - A flat EEG reading for a specified period of time is one criterion of brain death
    - Includes both the higher cortical functions and the lower brain stem functions

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- Decisions regarding life, death, and health care
  - Natural death act and advance directive
    - “Choice in Dying” created the living will, a legal document that reflects the patient's advance care planning

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- **Euthanasia:** The act of painlessly ending the lives of individuals who are suffering from an incurable disease or severe disability
  - **Passive euthanasia:** Treatment is withheld
  - **Active euthanasia:** Death deliberately induced
  - Recent cases - Terri Schiavo and Jack Kevorkian

# DEFINING DEATH AND LIFE/DEATH ISSUES

- Needed: Better care for dying individuals
  - Death in America is lonely, prolonged, and painful
  - A “good death” involves physical comfort, support from loved ones, acceptance, and appropriate medical care
  - **Hospice:** A program committed to making the end of life as free from pain, anxiety, and depression as possible
  - Emphasizes **palliative care**
    - Reducing pain and suffering, helping individuals die with dignity

# DEATH AND SOCIOHISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- Changing historical circumstances
  - The age group in which death most often occurs
  - Life expectancy has increased from 47 years for a person born in 1900 to 78 years for someone born today
  - Location of death
    - 80% of deaths in the U.S. today occur in institutions or hospitals

# DEATH AND SOCIOHISTORICAL, CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- Death in different cultures
  - Cultural variations characterize experience of death and attitudes about death
    - Individuals more conscious of death in times of war, famine, and plague
  - In most societies, death is not viewed as the end of existence
    - Spirit lives on
  - Americans are death avoiders and death deniers

# 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 somehow be postponed or delayed
  - **Depression:** Dying person comes to accept 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



# FACING ONE'S OWN DEATH

- Perceived control and denial
  - 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

- Open communication with a dying person is very important because:
  - They can close their lives in accord with their own ideas about proper dying
  - They may be able to complete plans and projects, and make arrangements and decisions
  - They have the opportunity to reminisce and converse with others
  - They have more understanding of what is happening to them

# GRIEVING

- Dimensions of grieving
  - **Grief:** Emotional numbness, disbelief, separation anxiety, despair, sadness, and loneliness that accompany the loss of someone we love
  - Pining or yearning reflects an intermittent, recurrent wish or need to recover the lost person
  - Most survivors experience normal or uncomplicated grief reactions
    - Include sadness and even disbelief or considerable anguish

# GRIEVING

- By six months after their loss, they accept it as a reality
  - More optimistic about the future, function competently in their everyday lives
- **Prolonged grief disorder:** Grief that involves enduring despair and remains unresolved over an extended period of time

# GRIEVING

- Disenfranchised grief - An individual's grief involving a deceased person that is a socially ambiguous loss that can't be openly mourned or supported
  - Examples - Ex-spouse, abortion, stigmatized death (such as AIDS)

# 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

# MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD

- Grieving stimulates individuals to try to make sense of their world
- A reliving of the events leading to the death is common
- 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

- The death of an intimate partner brings profound grief
- Many widows are lonely
  - The poorer and less educated they are, the lonelier they tend to be



# FORMS OF MOURNING

- Approximately 66% are buried and 34% are cremated
- Funerals are an important aspect of mourning in many cultures
- Cultures vary in how they practice mourning