

**Life-Span Development  
Thirteenth Edition**

Chapter 20: Death, Dying, and Grieving

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**The Death System and Cultural Contexts**

- The Death System and Its Cultural Variations
  - Components comprising the death system:
    - People
    - Places or contexts
    - Times
    - Objects
    - Symbols

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**The Death System and Cultural Contexts**

- The Death System and Its Cultural Variations
  - Cultural variations in the death system
    - Ancient Greeks – to live a full life and die with glory
    - Most societies have a ritual that deals with death
    - In most societies, death is not viewed as the end of existence as the spiritual body is believed to live on

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**The Death System and Cultural Contexts**

- Changing Historical Circumstances:
  - The age group in which death most often occurs, most often among older adults
  - 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

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Issues in 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
  - Includes both the higher cortical functions and the lower brain-stem functions

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Decisions Regarding Life, Death, and Health Care
  - Natural Death Act and Advance Directive
    - Living Will is designed to be filled in while the individual can still think clearly
    - Advance directive: states that life-sustaining procedures shall not be used to prolong their lives when death is imminent

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Decisions Regarding Life, Death, and Health Care
  - 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

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Decisions Regarding Life, Death, and Health Care
  - Needed: Better Care for Dying Individuals
    - Death in America is often lonely, prolonged, and painful
    - A "good death" involves physical comfort, support from loved ones, acceptance, and appropriate medical care

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Decisions Regarding Life, Death, and Health Care
  - Fail-safe measures for avoiding pain at the end of life
    - Make a living will
  - Give someone power of attorney
  - Give doctors specific instructions such as “Do not resuscitate” or “Do everything possible”
  - Discuss with the family whether or not you want to die at home
  - Check insurance to see if it covers home care or hospice care

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## Defining Death and Life/Death Issues

- Decisions Regarding Life, Death, and Health 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
  - 90% of hospice care is in patients' homes

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## A Developmental Perspective On Death

- Causes of Death
  - Causes of death vary across the life span:
    - Prenatal death through miscarriage
  - SIDS is the leading cause of infant death in the U.S.
  - Accidents or illness cause most childhood deaths
  - Most adolescent and young adult deaths result from suicide, homicide, or motor vehicle accidents
  - Middle-age and older adult deaths usually result from chronic diseases

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## A Developmental Perspective On Death

- Attitudes Toward Death at Different Points in the Life Span
  - Childhood
    - Young children believe the dead can be brought back to life
  - Around 9 years of age, children view death as universal and irreversible
  - Honesty is the best strategy in discussing death with children

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## A Developmental Perspective On Death

- Attitudes Toward Death at Different Points in the Life Span

- Adolescence
  - Death regarded as remote and may be avoided, glossed over, or kidded about.
  - Death of friends, siblings, parents, or grandparents bring death to the forefront of adolescents' lives
- Develop more abstract conceptions about death than children

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## A Developmental Perspective On Death

- Attitudes Toward Death at Different Points in the Life Span

- Adulthood
  - Middle-aged adults actually fear death more than young adults
  - Older adults are forced to examine the meanings of life and death more frequently than younger adults

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## Facing One's Own Death

- Knowledge of death's inevitability permits us to establish priorities and structure our time
- Three areas of concern:
  - Privacy and autonomy in regard to their families
  - Inadequate information about physical changes and medication as death approached
  - Motivation to shorten their life

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## Facing One's Own Death

- Kübler-Ross' Stages of Dying:
  - Denial and Isolation: "It can't be!"
  - Anger: "Why me?"
  - Bargaining: "Just let me do this first!"
  - Depression: withdrawal, crying, and grieving
  - Acceptance: a sense of peace comes

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## Facing One's Own Death

Kubler-Ross' Stages of Dying



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## 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

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## Facing One's Own Death

- The Contexts in Which People Die
  - More than 50% of Americans die in hospitals and nearly 20% die in nursing homes
  - Hospitals offer many important advantages:
    - Professional staff members
    - Technology may prolong life

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- 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

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- 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
    - Cognitive factors are involved in the severity of grief

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Grieving
  - Good family communications can help reduce the incidence of depression and suicidal thoughts
  - Prolonged Grief: difficulty moving on with their life
  - 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)

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Grieving
  - Dual-Process Model of Coping and Bereavement
    - Two Main Dimensions
      - Loss-oriented stressors: focus on the deceased individual
      - Restoration-oriented stressors: secondary stressors that emerge as indirect outcomes of bereavement
    - Effective coping involves oscillation between coping with loss and coping with restoration

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- 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

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Grieving
  - Cultural Diversity in Healthy Grieving
    - Some cultures emphasize the importance of breaking bonds with the deceased and returning quickly to autonomous lifestyles
  - Non-Western cultures suggest that beliefs about continuing bonds with the deceased vary extensively
  - There is no one right, ideal way to grieve

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Making Sense of the World
  - Grieving often 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

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Losing a Life Partner
  - The death of an intimate partner often brings profound grief
  - Widows outnumber widowers because women live longer than men
  - Widowed women are probably the poorest group in America
  - Many widows are lonely

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## Coping With The Death Of Someone Else

- Forms of Mourning
  - Approximately two-thirds are buried and one-third are cremated
  - Funerals are an important aspect of mourning in many cultures
  - Cultures vary in how they practice mourning

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