

**You're number  
one!**

**How to take  
care of yourself  
while taking  
care of others**

Maternal Mental Health  
Forum

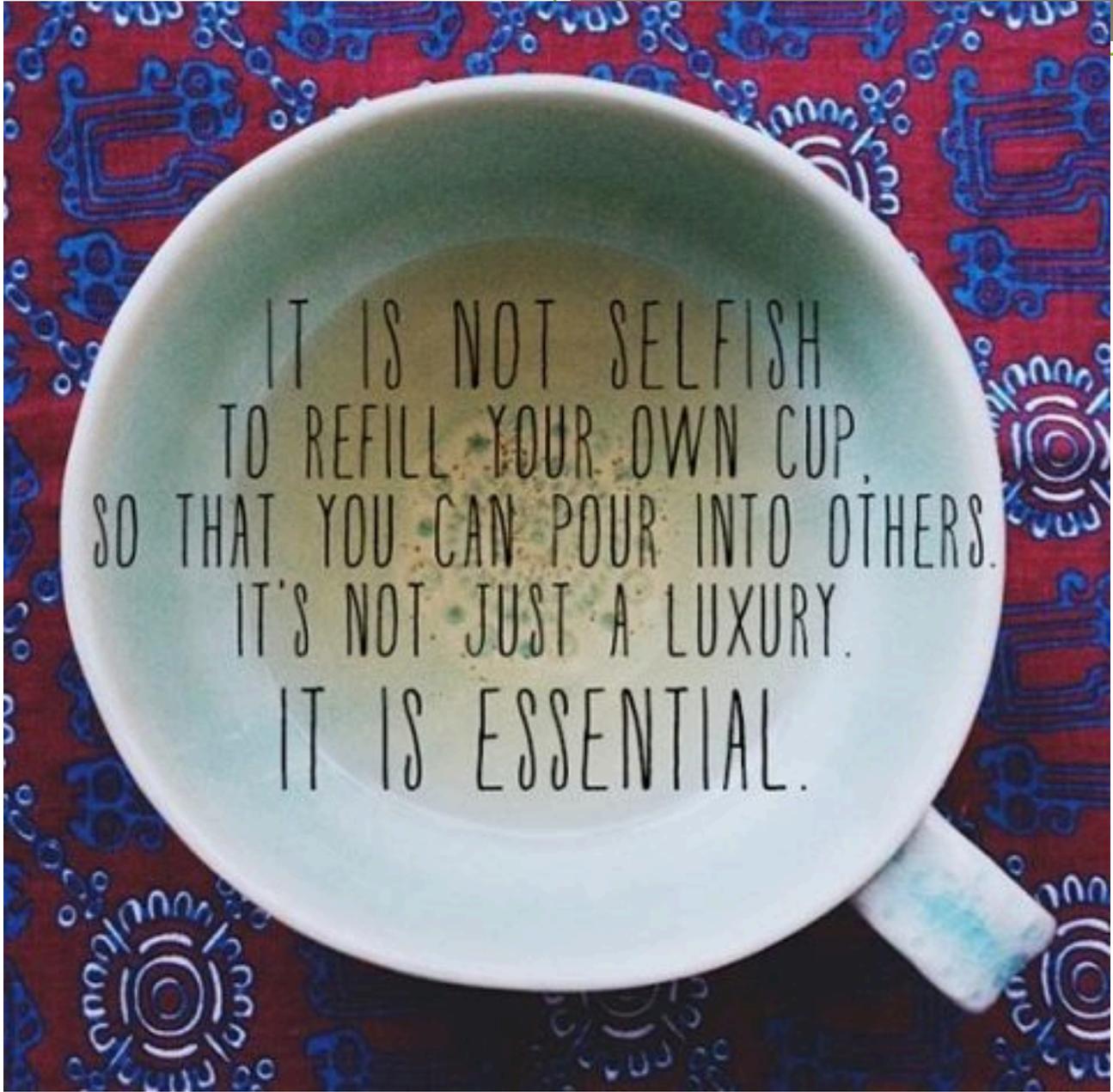
January 26, 2016

# Goals of this lecture

- ❧ Emphasize importance of taking care of yourself when caring for others
- ❧ Understand how one's perspective affects grieving
- ❧ Know the difference between empathy and sympathy
- ❧ Understand how both affect the caregiver
- ❧ Review coping strategies for caregivers

# You're number one!

- ❖ It's in our nature as caregivers to place high priority on our patient's well being
- ❖ However in order to continue to deliver high-level care, we must take care of ourselves as well.
- ❖ Sometimes we have to fight the urge to be "heroes", sacrificing our own health in order to care for others

A white ceramic mug is centered in the frame, set against a vibrant background of a red and blue patterned fabric. The fabric features intricate, repeating geometric and floral motifs in blue on a red base. The mug is filled with a light-colored liquid, and the text is printed in a black, hand-drawn, sans-serif font. The text is arranged in five lines, centered within the mug's opening. The overall composition is framed by a light green border with a subtle geometric pattern.

IT IS NOT SELFISH  
TO REFILL YOUR OWN CUP,  
SO THAT YOU CAN POUR INTO OTHERS.  
IT'S NOT JUST A LUXURY.  
IT IS ESSENTIAL.

# Who am I?

- ☒ Pediatric Critical Care Attending, CHOC Children's
- ☒ Father of 2 girls
- ☒ Married 10 years
- ☒ Grew up on a cattle farm in Maine
- ☒ Travel: 20 countries on 5 continents
- ☒ Languages: English and Spanish
- ☒ Interests: Photography, art, nature, music
- ☒ Activities: Beach volleyball, Crossfit, SCUBA

# Who am I?

- ❏ I am not a psychologist, psychiatrist
- ❏ I frequently work with families in stressful, sad situations where there are no easy solutions
- ❏ I do my best to understand their emotions and guide them through the experience with a balance of hope for the best, but preparation for everything else
- ❏ Most of this lecture is opinion, not fact, based on my experience as a caregiver.

# Why do I tell you this?

- ☒ Everyone is an individual
  - ☒ Different experience = different perspective
    - ☒ Family
    - ☒ Culture
    - ☒ Religion
    - ☒ Major life events
- ☒ These pieces shape the perspective or *framework* on how **we each** process events

A person's hands are visible at the bottom corners, holding a dark, ornate picture frame. The frame is filled with a photograph of a sunset sky with soft, glowing clouds. The word "Perspective" is centered within the frame in a blue, sans-serif font.

Perspective

# Understand your framework

- ☒ Knowing your framework can help you understand your reactions, just as knowing a mother's history can help you understand her perception of events

# Event + Perspective = Emotion

## ☒ Perspective

- ☒ I drop my flashing Halloween necklace from the Dollar store in the pool. It ceases to work, forever.
- ☒ My 3 year old drops a flashing Halloween necklace from the Dollar store in the pool. It ceases to work, **forever**.
- ☒ Our responses are going to differ greatly, not because the event is different, but because we have different frameworks about that necklace.
- ☒ If you have a framework of never having had a flashing Halloween necklace before, and that might be the only one in the entire world, and now it's gone, and it was your fault, you might be distraught too.

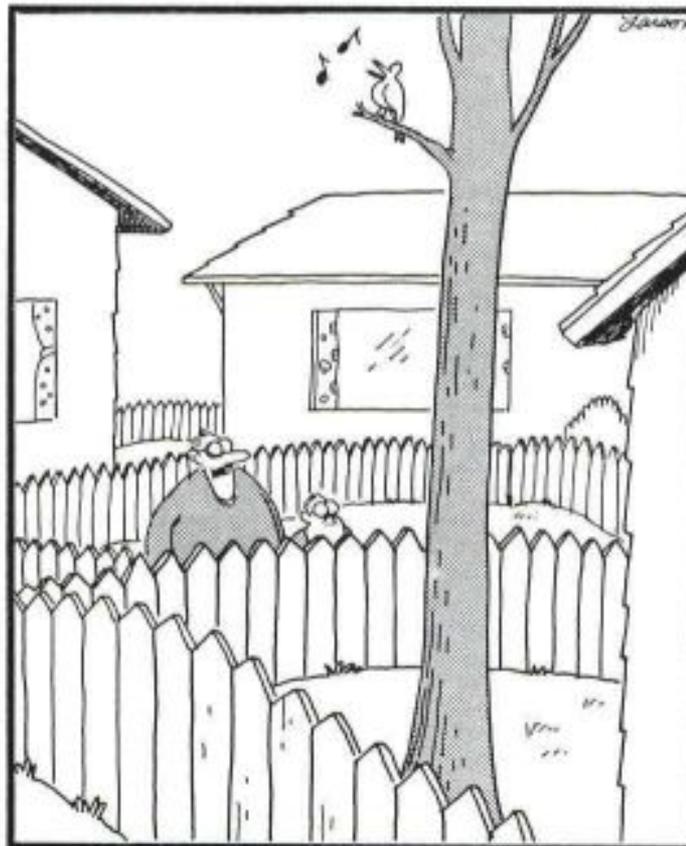
# Perspective



# Perspective



# Perspective



"And now, Randy, by use of song, the male sparrow will stake out his territory... an instinct common in the lower animals."

# Empathy -vs- Sympathy

Po-tay-to, po-tah-to or potato, tomato?

# Empathy vs Sympathy

- ❧ Feelings in the presence of others suffering
- ❧ Can be viewed on a spectrum:
- ❧ Pity → Benevolence → Sympathy → Empathy → Compassion

# Sympathy

- ☒ Understanding someone else's misfortune. Feeling “with” someone else’s emotion.
- ☒ Not actually feeling the same emotion, but having a close connection with what someone else is feeling and typically linked to a desire to help them
- ☒ Example: “The government officials expressed sympathy for the families of the coal miners who died in the explosion”

# Empathy

- ❧ Empathy: Sharing in the emotions of others. A mutual experience of emotion. Feeling “into” someone else’s state of mind.
- ❧ You feel **empathy** when you've "been there", “walked a mile in another’s shoes”
  - ❧ Eg: “The secretary empathized with the family as she had lost her father to a heart attack as well”
- ❧ Some caregivers blur the line as they emotionally “put themselves in the patient’s shoes” even if they haven’t been in the same situation personally.
  - ❧ Eg: “The young nurse empathized with the family and wept with them at the child’s bedside”

# Empathy

'It means very little to know that a million Chinese are starving unless you **know** one Chinese who is starving.'

-John Steinbeck

## 4 Qualities of Empathy (Wiseman)

1. To see the world as another person sees it
  - ☒ Putting aside your perspective
2. Staying out of judgment
3. Understand another person's feelings
  - ☒ In order to do so we must be in touch with our own feelings, but be able to put them aside
4. Communicate our understanding of those feelings
  - ☒ But not trying to “fix” them or make them better

# Thanks for the vocabulary lesson, but what does this have to do with coping with loss?

- ❧ We assume “loss” means death
- ❧ We assume we’re talking about family coping with loss of a loved one
- ❧ Loss may take other forms
  - ❧ More often the “loss” may be a gap between expectations and reality
    - ❧ The healthy baby vs a baby born prematurely, ill or with congenital defects
- ❧ It may be the caregiver who is grieving
  - ❧ Loss of a patient
  - ❧ Via sympathy or empathy with the family

# What is your perspective?

- ☒ Acknowledge that you do have a unique perspective that may alter your emotional response to events
  - ☒ For better or worse
- ☒ Acknowledge that you do have a different perspective than the family may allow you to understand them better

# The event

- ❧ A mother loses a child at birth due to extreme prematurity
- ❧ A mother loses a child at 2 weeks of life to overwhelming pneumococcal sepsis
- ❧ A mother loses a child after 4 months in the NICU following surgery for a congenital heart defect
- ❧ A mother loses a child at 6 years old to leukemia

# What happens to the mother?

What is her perspective?

What is her experience?

# 7 Stages of Grief

(Modified Kubler-Ross Model)

**Shock\***

- Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.

**Denial**

- Trying to avoid the inevitable.

**Anger**

- Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.

**Bargaining**

- Seeking in vain for a way out.

**Depression**

- Final realization of the inevitable.

**Testing\***

- Seeking realistic solutions.

**Acceptance**

- Finally finding the way forward.

# What else?

- ☒ Numbness, confusion, disbelief
- ☒ Sadness, guilt, loneliness, despair, regret
- ☒ Loss of ability to self-reflect, inability to gain perspective

# What happens to the caregiver as these mothers experience loss?

What is their perspective?

What is their experience?

# 7 Stages of Grief

(Modified Kubler-Ross Model)

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# What else?

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# What's the difference?

- ❖ For the mother, the loss is personal, first hand
- ❖ The mother hasn't experienced this degree of loss before
- ❖ The provider's loss is second-hand, no matter how close they were to the patient
- ❖ The provider likely has experienced similar loss, albeit sympathetically or empathetically

# Experience

- ☒ Alters perspective and expectations
- ☒ Allows refinement of grieving process
- ☒ **May** allow you to start the grieving process earlier and progress faster

# There is no vaccination for grieving

- ❖ Just because you are a provider, doesn't mean you are immune to grieving
- ❖ In fact, some would say an essential component of being a great caregiver is to be vulnerable
- ❖ Coping well does not mean the loss is any less sad or less meaningful

# Is Empathy “better” than sympathy?

- ❏ Empathy is generally considered a deeper connection
- ❏ Empathy is also more emotionally draining
- ❏ Sympathy can be delivered with compassion and be equally as helpful and healing as empathy
- ❏ Understand what your capacity is to empathize with each patient
  - ❏ If your empathy starts to affect your work or life outside of work, you may need to change your approach
  - ❏ Remember your job is to help the swimmer, not drown with them

# Simultaneous Coping

- ☒ Awareness of your **framework** for experiencing loss, puts you a step ahead in working through the process of grieving
- ☒ Ideally, understand your framework **before** you experience loss
  - ☒ It will also help you empathize if you can set aside that framework and see it unfiltered or from the mother's perspective

# Be aware of where **you** are in grieving process when interacting with family

- ☒ Pause and self-evaluate before interacting with family
- ☒ More than likely they will not be in the same place as you are, nor have the same facility to move through the stages of grieving
- ☒ Identify where they are in the process and support appropriately

# Compartmentalizing care

- ❏ Take care of yourself separately from taking care of the family
  - ❏ When you are with the family, your job is to take care of them.
  - ❏ That doesn't mean you can't express sympathy, empathy or be compassionate with them
  - ❏ But they shouldn't be distracted by the thought of "Who is going to take care of them?"

# Coping during each stage of grief: How we help the mother

## ☒ **Preparation**

- ☒ Shock: Be present, silence is underrated
- ☒ Denial: Listen, try to understand, emphasize fact (not opinion or judgment)
- ☒ Anger: listen, don't take it personally, legitimize (it's not fair)
- ☒ Bargaining: don't offer false hope, focus on what can be done
- ☒ Depression: be with them, give structure, keep moving forward, counseling
- ☒ Testing: provide activities, return to normal schedule
- ☒ Acceptance: continue vigilance to support new stage of life

# How to help yourself through stages of grief?

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"Oh I could tell you where self-help is, but that'd sort of defeat the purpose, wouldn't it."

# Take your time

- ❏ People often feel there is a time limit on their grieving process
  - ❏ “I have to process this now and get on with my life”
  - ❏ “I can’t do anything until I’ve finished grieving”
- ❏ It is a marathon, not a sprint
  - ❏ Pace yourself
  - ❏ Gradually address your grieving
  - ❏ Allow yourself to take a break from grieving, regroup, re-energize, do something you enjoy, sleep, etc
- ❏ There will be ups and downs
  - ❏ Grief may come back (with or without a clear reason) long after the event has passed.

# Take your space

- Find a space you feel safe to address your grief
  - Alone
  - With one other person
  - In a group
  - A quiet room
  - “Your happy place”

# Talk about it, feel it

- ☒ You are not alone in the process
  - ☒ Most of your friends, family, colleagues have experienced grief at some point
  - ☒ Find someone who is a good listener, has had similar loss
- ☒ Acceptance is the goal, not forgetting
- ☒ It's ok to be emotional
  - ☒ Cry, be angry, etc, but try to understand what you are sad about or angry at and direct it appropriately
- ☒ Grief is often related to not feeling in control
  - ☒ Understanding and accepting what we can control and what we can't goes a long way toward healing

# Distract yourself, Redirect

## ☒ Redirect the grief

- ☒ There's always another patient who needs your caring & understanding
- ☒ Channel the loss into positive change
  - ☒ Fund raisers
  - ☒ Foundations
  - ☒ Administrative change
  - ☒ Activism, education
  - ☒ Support groups

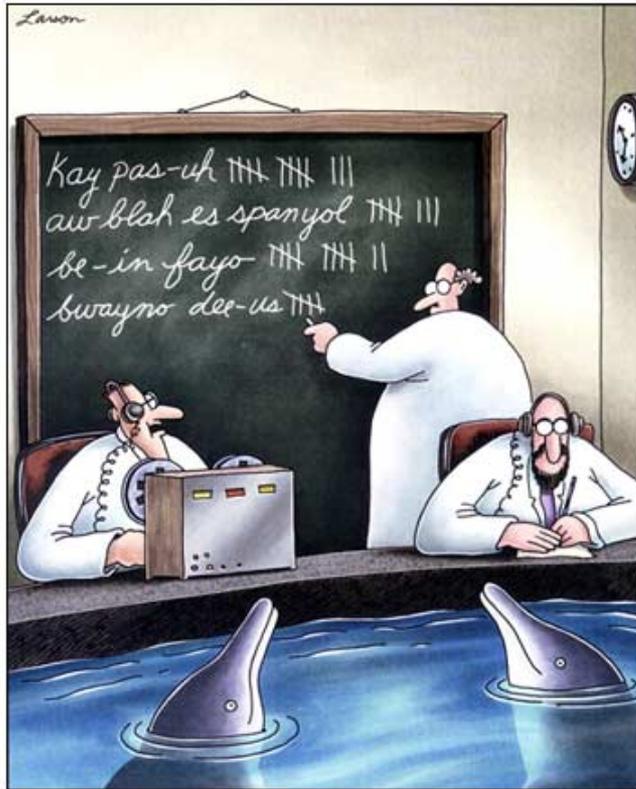
# Step back and re-examine

- ☒ Focus on what you have, not what you lost
  - ☒ Can be difficult because your perspective may be distorted
- ☒ Identify steps of the process that *may* have been skipped
  - ☒ If they are left unresolved it can cause stress in the future

# Call on your favors

- ☒ Now is the time to ask for help
  - ☒ Not just psychological help
- ☒ Financial
- ☒ Childcare
- ☒ Family, friends, church, colleagues
- ☒ Don't wait for or expect help

# Not everyone will understand



"Matthews, we've got another one of those 'ah - blah- es- span- yol' sounds"

- ☒ People understand grief to the extent that they have experienced it
- ☒ Don't expect everyone to understand
- ☒ You don't have to explain your grief, but sometimes trying to verbalize can enhance your own understanding of what you're feeling
- ☒ Be willing to accept help
- ☒ Choose your shoulder to cry on wisely

# Summary

- ☒ Take care of yourself first, so you can care for others
- ☒ Reflect on and understand your individual “perspective”
- ☒ Learn how to view events with or without your perspective
- ☒ Be sympathetic and empathetic without losing sight of your role as care giver
- ☒ Everyone copes differently. Respect and understand those differences
- ☒ Don't be afraid to ask for help and be vulnerable. It is what makes you a great care giver!