

## Press information

### EU-Partnership project Dying and Death in Europe

European Partnership Team found four steps for bereavement to come to terms with loss.

A working manual for professionals can be used for bereavement groups or to accompany terminally ill patients and their relatives. Exercises and meditation for vocational education are offered to avoid stress and burnout, to increase self-awareness and self-esteem to accompany dying persons and their relatives. Four main steps are described which seem to be a part of any bereavement and any dealing with loss. Knowing and using these steps, will support professionals and their clients.



During our Leonardo da Vinci European Partnership Project a group of psychologists, medical doctors, coaches, counselors and caregivers from France, Spain, Poland and Germany shared their knowledge, experience and needs. We worked together for a period of two years and found four helpful steps.

In our first meeting in Barcelona 2009 we agreed on goals and working structures and informed ourselves by listening to various lectures about various aspects of dying, death and bereavement. In Hamburg, different international lecturers talked about how dying and death is dealt with in their countries. One special event was a presentation of the 'children's grieving suitcase' to show a new method to prepare children with this topic.



The discussion continued in Paris with religious, psychotherapeutic and philosophical aspects. We decided to focus on people, who have successfully come to terms with their loss and found solution orientated ways to deal with such life events. We asked for the turning point, which turns from a suffering and survival perspective to a new life and development perspective.



The meeting in Warsaw coincided with the National Day of Mourning because of the tragic plane crash as the President of Poland and many other members of the Polish authorities died. Our workshop about the bereavement panorama fell into this very special atmosphere. We held it on that National Bereavement and Funeral Day and our first theoretical results were practiced in very special surroundings. The

results and the feedback were so positive, that we decided, to follow this path.

Six month later during the meeting in Warsaw, we came in contact with two phenomena. First we got emotionally involved in the mourning problems by discussing the emotional aspects of grief. This showed us how dangerously close you can come to losing the overview. Then after work, during a nightly sightseeing tour, we came across a demonstration in front of the President's Palace. There was a high emotional conflict about a wooden cross in front of the President's Palace. The Christian Cross had been spontaneously established as a sign of bereavement for the 96 deceased on the national day of mourning. After the cross has been standing there for six months it became a point of conflict and showed political and public phenomena about respect, hurt feelings and grief. The new President wanted to take it away, which caused emotional and political protests. We talked with protesters on both sides and got very important input to our perspectives.

We could understand that there were emotional conflicts between respecting the past by appreciating and keeping the memory of the deceased and paying attention to continuing in the future. These very emotional conversations, that special atmosphere and the individual messages of the demonstrators supported our project in an unimaginably remarkable way. Due to our international group and perspectives, we found a new and important milestone. We found out how important it is, to define a key-message for one's own future and for one's own life. A self-defined appreciation of someone's life and behavior helps to come to terms with the life experience of loss. We noticed this as a key to find the individual turning point and to come to emotional terms with loss, dying and death.

This achievement especially shows the value of international partnership projects. No one would have found it on his or her own. The Polish colleagues couldn't, because of their cultural and emotional connection to the content. The other members needed the multicultural cognitive and emotional input from an observing position. Multi-national partnership is the key for new findings and spreading European achievements. Such international partnership is the base for finding common European perspectives. New effective knowledge for vocational education, which is not limited by national cultural influences, but supported by respecting national culture, is easy to implement in European-wide lifelong learning. We wish to continue and will develop more effectively European based tools and courses, which respect cultural uniqueness and enriches and inspires multicultural development.

In Cadaques in Spain, we structured our findings into four main steps, discussed the beliefs, spiritual and cultural differences and decided on options of how to work and define a manual for vocational education to support professionals. The four main steps to come to terms with loss are the following:

1. Working with someone's belief
2. Finding sense and defining a Key-Message
3. Turning from survival to personal development
4. Integrating life experience by harmonizing the Bereavement Panorama

In between various meetings we also met in smaller groups or via skype and developed exercises. In Cassis (France) and Lübeck (Germany), we approved and discussed all achievements and offered exercises and decided on the content of the manual. We also discussed and prepared the content of the website [www.ddproject.eu](http://www.ddproject.eu) we are going to make the outcome accessible in every country. We also decided to support each other by national promotion, e.g. the outcome and the manual has been presented to the Polish Hospice Foundation by a German-Polish Delegation.

Results are as follows:

- Suffering from a loss is a sign of deep love and connection.
- The pain concerning the loss of a person is related to the belief system of the grieving person and to the individual mental representation of the relationship (Bereavement Panorama) to the deceased and other persons.
- A successful dealing with loss is an achievement of becoming aware of own presuppositions, finding sense and a key-message, getting the turning point and harmonizing the Bereavement Panorama to find new future perspectives.

The main outcome is the achievement of this four step meta-structure, how to come to terms with loss, which is described in our manual for vocational education. The manual contents description and exercises are there to support professionals before and during their work with dying persons and their relatives.

Two meditations, recorded on CDs, offer a relaxing way of self-experience about a sudden death and an announced death. They are available in German and English.

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ECP-Akademie

Deutsche Akademie für Psychotherapie und Beratung GmbH

Dr. Klaus Witt Baumschulenstr. 23 D 22941 Bargteheide Tel. 04532 501653

[www.ecp-akademie.de](http://www.ecp-akademie.de) [office@ecp-akademie.de](mailto:office@ecp-akademie.de)