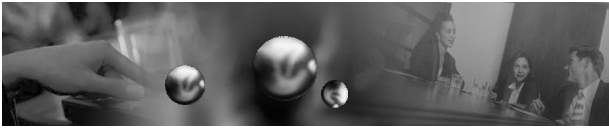


Working with Resistance and People Bereaved by Suicide



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22 Nov 2007

SPINZ 2007 Symposium: Building the Jigsaw –
Collaborating for Suicide Prevention

Outline

1. Power and Suicide
2. What is Resistance?
3. When Does it Occur ?
4. Positive & Negative Effects
5. Working Through it
6. Controlling vs. Embracing Resistance?

The importance of reframing, reflective practice, communication and collaboration

Power and Suicide

- The bereaved are often left feeling powerless following suicide.
- Professionals have a responsibility to help the bereaved regain control and exercise power.
- Often the values, ideals and methods used by professionals serve to reinforce powerlessness in the bereaved rather than empower them.
- When the support that is offered to those bereaved by suicide does not meet their needs, or when it is not offered in an appropriate way or at an appropriate time – resistance can occur.

“There is no power without resistance”

Foucault (1990)

- By looking at resistance within the bereaved we can better understand how the bereaved view and mediate the exercise of power.

- “Resistances are defined as **practices which express opposition to rules and norms in specific contexts**, and which contain critiques of social relations, from the lived experience of marginalisation” (Bottrell, 2007, p.599).
- Our understanding of resistance must go beyond conceptualisations of **oppositional behaviour and personal deficit** to include an analysis of **social relations** (Bottrell, 2007).
- In dealing with marginalisation, difficult circumstances and competing demands, the bereaved’s resistances may be seen as attempts to counter negative images and to create new identities for themselves. **To exercise power.**
- The bereaved have to negotiate their own inner world after the death (make sense of suicide) but also have to negotiate sociocultural norms about grief, loss and life after suicide. For many, this does not occur in a linear way and their grief does not fit the pattern outlined in stages theories of grief (Begley & Quayle, 2007).

Why Do People Resist Going to Counselling?

1. Negative perceptions of counselling (e.g., for certain people, for people with serious mental illness).
2. Confidentiality issues.
3. Counselling not seen as the ‘best remedy’.
4. Preference for life-coaching.

(Gyllenten, Palmer & Farrants, 2005)



Why Do People Resist Change Within Counselling?

- According to Worrell (1997) resistance has been a central concern to most models of counselling and psychotherapy.
- Resistance has been defined as:
 - **Residing in the individual** and expressive of irrational beliefs (e.g., "It's too hard to change", "I can't change").
 - **Client behaviour** that is defined by the therapist as anti-therapeutic.
 - 'Defensive operations' and **non-compliance** to specific therapeutic goals/tasks and directives.
 - Related to **shortcomings in the therapist** and the therapist not handling a particular person in the right way.



- According to Worrell (1997):

- Resistance can also be viewed as an **intersubjective phenomena** occurring between people.
- It can be interpreted as **expressive of people's attempts to preserve a sense of self from perceived attack**.
- It requires support providers to:
 - connect to the bereaved,
 - 'be with' the bereaved and find out how they are being-in-the world,
 - find out how they are defining their self in relation to others, and
 - find out what may be threatening them.



Why/When Does Resistance Occur?

- Garon (2006) argues that resistance occurs when:
 - People feel they **lack power**.
 - Power is abused.
 - When people **don't have a voice**.
 - When people feel they are **treated unfairly**, insensitively or with a lack of respect.
 - When people are **not involved** in decision-making.
- Dent and Goldberg (1999) report that resistance can also occur when:
 - **People are not clear** about the who, what, why, when, and where of the change.
 - **Change threatens** someone's status.
 - The change can **isolate** someone.
 - And when people are **already 'overburdened'**.



- People bereaved by suicide may be at various points in their adjustment to loss and have different abilities to cope with their circumstances (Mitchell, Wesner, Garand, Gale, Havill & Brownson, 2007).
- People may show resistance when they are **ascribed an identity and social position**. People may struggle for chosen identities and against unchosen social identities and when processes reinscribe marginalised individuals also consitute further **marginalisation** (Bottrell, 2007) (e.g., labelling the bereaved "at risk" of suicide).
- **When change is imposed**, comes at the wrong time, when they have little say in the nature or the direction of the change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999).
- When people **fear** change or future failure (Worrell, 1997).



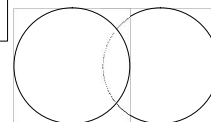
Positive or Negative?

- Worrell (1997) discusses how:
 - Resistance is often seen by professionals and counsellors/therapists as negative.
 - The focus is often on the individual who is seen as resistant to change and not much attention is given to the relationship and way of being.
- Garon (2006) argues that resistance can:
 - Be seen as a way that the less powerful speak up.
 - Requires courage.
 - Lead to change – particularly when less powerful are given an opportunity to speak up.



Powerful
Expert knowledge
Provider
Understands
change that is
required

Professionals



Powerless
Lay knowledge
In need
Stuck
Difficulty voicing
concerns

Bereaved


- Often we focus on **CONTENT** of support and programmes rather than on **social discourse and power relations**.

Acts of Resistance

- Taking a stand.
- Expressing concerns.
- Protesting.
- Failing to cooperate, stopping, go-slows.
- Whistle-blowing.
- Confronting and questioning.
- Occur *within relationships*.
- **There can be individual and collective acts of resistance.**
- Can be expressed in creative ways – are forms of communicating “private discourse” or “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1990 cited in Garon, 2006).

QUESTION 1

- What acts of resistance have you experienced when supporting someone who has been bereaved?



<http://www.artintime.com/images/Original%20Paintings-Gene%20Gould/grief.jpg>

QUESTION 2

- Why did these acts of resistance occur?
- What circumstances led to them?

Examples from a Bereaved by Suicide Support Group

- **Resistance between the bereaved & facilitators:**
 - When assessment is involved that labels, focuses on clinical diagnoses, or problems in the bereaved (rather than a needs assessment).
 - When practice or support doesn't meet needs.
 - Timing and readiness. When tasks of grief are emphasised and bereaved not “at that stage”, feel they are not ready for information.
- **Resistance between group members:**
 - When judgments are made and progress compared.
 - Language used (gender, cultural attitudes, personal beliefs).
 - Strategies offered not perceived as appropriate or relevant.
 - Not participating ‘silent’.
- Need to look at **individual AND group processes**, safety, structure and facilitation.
- Need to **create SPACES for people to have a voice** – express how they are being in the world, where they are at in their journey.

Positive Views & Effects of Resistance

- **Positive view**
 - Bereaved exercising power, communicating concerns, ethical safety valve, time to stop and reflect.
- **Positive reaction** – collaboration.
- **Positive effects**
 - Bereaved given a voice and realise they have **POWER** and control.
 - Shared understandings.
 - Find a way forward – problem-solve.
 - Learn from one another, increased self-knowledge, growth.
 - Changed roles, new policies and standards of practice.

Negative Views and Effects of Resistance

- **Negative view**
 - Seen as disobedient, disrespectful, challenging, a person attack.
- **Negative reaction** – retaliation, putting down the rebellion, ignoring.
- **Negative effects**
 - Bereaved are often “silenced”, labelled ‘trouble makers’, excluded, chastised, and as a result disengage.
 - Professional/support person fails to correct power imbalance or learn from individual or group – no chance for change.
 - What often holds people back from “speaking up” – **FEAR**.
 - Little chance of future opportunities for resistance and collaboration.

Controlling Resistance

- When resistance is viewed as negative and something to be controlled:
- **Ignore it:** and hope that whatever caused it goes away too.
- **Use power:** Try to make people go along.
- **Use reason:** Explain why change must occur once again in more detail.
- **Manipulate:** Play one person against another and maybe you will get someone to change.
- **Use Relationships:** Call in favours that you are owed.
- **Make Deals:** Compromise and dilute the change.
- **Give up too soon:** Lose motivation and quit.


Embracing Resistance

- Resistance is always present where there are power relationships.
- To find out the information that resistance brings it is important to **seek it out**.
- People who are resistant have **valuable information** that others do not have.
- They **see change from a different perspective** and view it as problematic.
- Need to embrace and respect this view and resistance.
- Need strong working relationships that are founded on respect, honesty, give-and-take, and on achieving mutual goals.
- People who resist change are valuable assets, they can bring energy and different view to the planning and implementation process of achieving change.

Question 3: Managing Resistance

- How were the acts of resistance managed?
- What were the outcomes for you and the bereaved?

Some Suggestions: Working Through Resistance



1. **ACCESS / CONNECT & CLARIFY**
Start a dialogue, find out what is not working, what are the person's concerns, fears about change?
2. **ANALYSE**
What's not working? Why has this occurred?
Where is this person coming from? How are they 'being'?
Break down interactions/relationship.
3. **EVALUATE**
How have we been communicating?
What are the most important concerns?
How best can this be addressed?
4. **COMMUNICATE**
Give the bereaved a voice.
LISTEN – acknowledge what the person says. Resistance can be about not being heard.
Discuss and agree on how you will work through and find a solution, how roles will change, steps that need to be taken and who will take them and how you will measure success.
5. **CREATE**
Change and action, a new understanding or relationship.

Collaborate to Examine Forces

- Work together to examine what Kurt Lewin termed “driving forces” and “restraining forces”.
- For change to occur – driving forces must be more powerful than restraining forces.
- See Force Field Analysis – Analyzing change factors (12 Manage, 2007).

Driving Forces For Change		Restraining Forces Resisting Change	
External	External	External	External
Internal	Internal	Internal	Internal

Importance Of Reframing

- Resistance and dissent are not personal attacks or criticism.
- See them as early warning signs of trouble ahead.
- Open and collaborative styles of communication are important. Authoritarian and unidirectional styles cause resistance (Bisese, 1990).
- Silence is harmful – withholding info about potential problems can impede change and collaboration (participatory governance structures).
- See acts of resistance as motivated by principles and desire to being about and be a part of change.

Importance of Reflective Practice

- **Resistance is Information.**
- It is about saying “change the plan”.
- Must learn to listen to resistance.

CHANGE

FORM OF RESISTANCE

POSSIBLE REASON

RESPONSE

 - Focus on the reasons behind the resistance, not your assumptions about it.
 - Look for causes not symptoms.
 - Look at what change the person is being required to make.
 - What forms their resistance takes.
 - What the reason is for their resistance.
 - Possible responses to the resistance in all parties (e.g., change plan, new plan).

Look at Motives for Change

Hultman (1998) outlines 8 reasons why people *will* support change:

1. They believe their **needs are not being met**.
2. They believe the **change will make it easier for them** to meet their needs.
3. They believe **benefits will outweigh the risks** (of not changing).
4. They believe the **change is necessary to avoid or escape a harmful situation**.
5. They believe the **process is being handled properly**.
6. They believe the **change will work**.
7. The **change is consistent with their values**.
8. They believe **those responsible for the change can be trusted**.

Strategies

- **Establish positive climate** – where resistance is welcomed and explored safely.
- **Eliminate fear** – provide bereaved with opportunities to express their opinion and view on how and when change can occur.
- **Take a curious, non-intrusive and respectful stance.** Seek the person’s opinion (McCutcheon, Chanen, Fraser, Drew & Brewer, 2007).
- **Show people** that overcoming resistance to change can help them.

- **Treat people as competent** and help them develop skills and **confidence** to engage in change. Involve people in decision-making: help them find THEIR answer not THE answer.
- Use motivational interviewing, structured problem-solving that incorporates an examination of the costs and benefits of changing (or not changing) (McCutcheon et al., 2007).
- Use metaphorical expressions to help the bereaved work through ambivalence and fear of change by indirectly allowing them to express certain feelings that if dealt with directly may engender strong resistance.
- Metaphors can provide a safe bridge to explore change without resulting in real change (Lyddon, Clay & Sparks, 2001).

Importance of Communication

- **SHIFT the POWER** back to them.
- **Acknowledge the affect** – check to see why the person is angry, non-cooperative etc; ask the person what they want and establish your own needs and limits (McCutcheon et al, 2007).
- **Talk through things they have learnt from their resistance** and how they have grown.
- Talk through **how you will both use the knowledge to change** practice and relationship.
- **Empower the bereaved to find their voice:** Narratives of resistance.
- Use storytelling – everyone has a story to tell, provide people with confidence and platform to share them. Create safe space for personal and collective story telling (Horsley, 2007)

Importance of Collaboration

- **SHARE the POWER.**
- **Share ideas** about what might help, but let the bereaved work out what will work and how.
- **Be with them in their resistance** – don’t be in a hurry to shift them on, explore this aspect of their being in the world.
- Show them how seeking help is a positive form of resistance in itself – resisting isolation and dependence.



Resistance Leads to Change

- Resistance always leads to change.
- Without change there is no progress.
- Resistance can be positive and/or negative.
- Resistance can lead to transformation and change within the bereaved and those who support them.
- The outcomes of resistance depend on how we view resistance and how it is managed.



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