

Honouring the Mystery

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Exploration Not New

- Phenomenon documented historically
- Emerging interest in medical community
- Honours the sacred in life
- Helps with self care – healing – before and after death

Invitation to Adopt the Attitude of an Explorer

- Take time to truly listen to the experiences of the dying and bereaved
- Be open and curious

Parallels Between the Beginning and End of Life

- In the physical birthing process
- Between the perceptions of young children and the dying

Metaphoric Language

- *Words at the Threshold* by linguist Lisa Smartt
- Attune to the symbolic/poetic
- Experience is often hard to describe because it is beyond the realm of the literal word
- References to travel and trips
- When the metaphors are more unique to the individual's personal experience they can be missed – enroll family and friends
- Great insight can be revealed in the metaphoric language

Dr. Christopher Kerr's Work Out of Buffalo Hospice in New York

- Delirium vs. Death Bed Visions and Dreams. One tends to be distressing, disorganized and confused. DBVDs in contrast are calming, connected, real and able to be recalled.

Visual

- Experiences with light
- In NDE's, dreams and while conscious
- Invisible visitors, loved ones who have died coming to greet the dying or an inspirational presence
- New research being done on shared death bed experiences. Loved ones at bed side being pulled in and experiencing event simultaneously
- Can occur with both the dying and bereaved

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- Children and animals are often more intuitive and sensitive to these types of experiences

Auditory

- Less research on the subject and often overlooked but important to acknowledge
- Unique, symbolic to individual
- Sound of loved one's voice who has died, perhaps calling or soothing
- Can be a broad range of experiences like hearing music, wind, the ocean, etc.
- Generally positive and uplifting

Kinesthetic

- Sensitivity of the dying becomes heightened to smells, touch, intent
- Feeling the presence of someone near, i.e. hand on a shoulder, standing in the room
- Can be accompanied by the sound of a voice, a familiar smell or tied to an object of meaning
- Many stories from the bereaved
- Experiences that are metaphoric of the death, like the sensation of the wind or someone brushing past
- Silence can be rich and textured

Dreams

- Important to acknowledge for both the dying and bereaved (www.griefdreams.ca)
- Avenue for greater awareness and exploration
- Can be both metaphoric and lucid in nature. Different levels of experience
- Honor the individual reflection/interpretation
- Encourage the use of dream journals
- Life speaks to us all the time

Starts with the Individual

- Be courageous enough to have your own paradigm challenged
- Become more attune to the subtle and metaphoric in your own life
- Take time for meditation/contemplation
- Presence and trust are key
- Pay attention to your own dreams

With Patients and the Bereaved

- Be curious, sharing comes through trusting relationships
- Listen. Ask open-ended questions
- Learn from their wisdom
- Lead with the heart – compassion and empathy

See Resource/Reading list for more information

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