Week 1 - Student Case Study Assignment – Understanding Grief

Grief & Trauma: Navigating Loss, Awakening Life
Instructor: Dr. Althea Winifred

Instructions for Completing the Case Study:

1. Carefully read the entire case study narrative provided below.
2. Reflect thoughtfully on the grief experiences described.
3. Answer the reflection questions provided at the end.
4. Your written response should be between 300–500 words, using examples from the case study to support your insights.
5. Submit your completed assignment to the Student Portal or email it to SubstanceInstitute@gmail.com by the assigned due date.

Focus on identifying the emotional, physical, and relational dimensions of grief present in the case. Pay attention to both visible and hidden expressions of grief.

Reflection Questions:

1. Identify and describe at least three different types of grief David experienced throughout his story.
2. How did David's suppression of grief initially affect his emotional, relational, and physical well-being?
3. Discuss the difference between David's visible grief (what others saw) and hidden grief (what he carried internally).
4. Reflect on how cultural expectations of strength in military environments may have shaped David's response to loss.
5. In what ways did David begin to move toward healing? What steps were necessary for him to confront and process his grief?

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Submission Details:

- **Response Length:** 300 plus words
- **Due Date:** Monday, May 5th, 2025
- **Submit To:** SubstanceInstitute@gmail.com

Case Study: "The Silent Battle: Sergeant David Morales"

Sergeant David Morales had served twelve years in the United States Army, completing four overseas deployments during his career. Known among his peers as disciplined, loyal, and composed under pressure, David had built a life centered around service. The Army was not just his career—it was his identity, his family, and his source of pride.

David returned from his final deployment after a particularly difficult tour that had claimed the life of his closest friend and fellow soldier, Staff Sergeant Marcus James. Marcus and David had enlisted together, trained together, and survived earlier deployments side by side. Their families were close, often spending holidays and leave periods together. Marcus' death was sudden killed in an IED explosion just weeks before their unit was scheduled to rotate home.

At the time of Marcus' death, David did not shed a tear. He continued performing his duties, managing the unit's paperwork, coordinating memorial services, and mentoring younger soldiers who were struggling. His superiors praised him for his strength and professionalism under pressure.

What no one saw was that David had quietly packed away his grief along with Marcus' personal effects. He told himself, "You can't break down. You have to keep moving." His wife, Emily, noticed a difference

almost immediately when he came home. David, once full of jokes and warmth, became withdrawn and short-tempered. He struggled to sleep, often sitting up at night staring at the wall or compulsively checking the locks on the doors and windows.

David's two young children, ages six and eight, missed their playful father. Emily urged him to talk to someone, but David refused, saying, "I'm fine. I just need time." Whenever Marcus' name was mentioned, David would shut down or change the subject abruptly. He had packed away more than Marcus' belongings; he had packed away his own sorrow, anger, guilt, and fear.

Six months after returning home, David received notice that his time in active duty was coming to an end due to downsizing measures. Forced into retirement earlier than planned, David felt the ground beneath him collapse again. He had not only lost Marcus, but now he was losing the only career he had ever known. Grief layered upon grief, but still he told himself he was fine.

David attempted to find civilian work but struggled to maintain employment. Simple workplace conflicts triggered disproportionate anger. Deadlines paralyzed him with anxiety. He felt out of place everywhere, as if he had been forgotten by the country he had sacrificed so much to serve.

Over time, David withdrew even further from his family. He missed birthdays, skipped family outings, and spent increasing hours isolated in the garage. Emily pleaded with him to seek help, but David interpreted her concern as nagging and criticism. Their marriage strained under the weight of unspoken pain.

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One afternoon, after yet another sleepless night, David found himself standing in front of a photograph of Marcus. For the first time since returning home, he allowed himself to weep. The tears would not stop. His entire body shook as years of suppressed grief broke through the walls he had so carefully constructed.

Later that week, David made the difficult decision to attend a veterans' grief support group at the local community center. There, surrounded by others who understood the complexity of military loss, David slowly began to find language for what he had buried. It was not only the death of Marcus that he had grieved—it was also the death of his military identity, his sense of security, and the brotherhood that once anchored his world.

In time, David began working with a counselor specializing in trauma and grief. He started rebuilding bridges with his wife and children, learning how to express pain without rage, and allowing himself to mourn the many layers of loss he had endured. Healing was not immediate, but it had begun.

David learned that true strength was not in pretending grief away but in acknowledging it and walking through it with courage.