

Training Comments from Bill White

I regret not being able to join you today and appreciate the opportunity to send along warm greetings and best wishes. Grief is an inevitable experience within the work we do. The weight of its burden can harden the heart and exhaust our energy. COVID-19 on top of the continuing onslaught of opioid deaths has intensified these losses as we find ourselves in the midst of twin pandemics. To survive and serve, we must balance that grief with regular doses of joy of our own recovery and awe at the recoveries of so many others we served and will serve.

Addressing how best to cope with these losses must also include another type of grief. Anticipatory grief occurs when expectations of the loss of an individual are so strong that we find ourselves distancing or detaching ourselves to minimize the pain of that expected loss. When this happens, people experience being socially buried while still alive.

The most precious things we have to offer those we serve are a ministry of presence and a message of meaning and hope in the face of the worst circumstances. Maintaining that presence and our ability to convey hope requires focused self-maintenance. Four rituals of replenishment can help keep us centered on the larger meaning of our advocacy and recovery support work as well as help us sustain our personal health and perspective.

Centering rituals, whether in the form of prayer, formal meditation, or just quiet reflection, help us “keep our eyes on the prize” and allow us to remain grounded. They help us narrow the gap between aspirational recovery values (humility, honesty, integrity, tolerance, gratitude, forgiveness, etc.) and our daily actions. Mirroring rituals allow us to commune with kindred spirits for mutual support, for feedback on the quality of our advocacy work, and to rekindle our passion for recovery advocacy. Acts of self-care and personal responsibility allow time for self-repair and caring for the needs of our families and others of importance in our lives. “We must be careful in carrying light to the community to not leave our own homes in darkness.” Finally, Unpaid and unacknowledged acts of service help keep our egos in check and allow us to remain focused on the value of service to others and on our own recovery.

Those of you on the frontlines of peer recovery support are writing the future of recovery with your lives. I wish each of you Godspeed on your journey into that future.