

AOSW 2026 

Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

#AOSW2026



Facing the In-Between: A Survivor-Social Worker Conversation on Grief and Healing



Speakers



Lisa P. Nelson
DSW, LMSW, OSW-C
Oncology Social Worker



Megan-Claire Chase
2026 ASCO Voice
Cancer Survivor & Advocate

Objectives

**Explore grief
across the cancer
continuum**

**Examine survivor
and social worker
perspectives**

**Identify practical
approaches to
supporting grief**

Interactive Exercise #1

What am I grieving?



Interactive Exercise #2

Invisible Losses Inventory



Interactive Exercise #3

Before Cancer / After Cancer



Interactive Exercise #4

Emotional Weight We Carry from Work

How heavy is your backpack?



Questions for a Survivor-Social Worker Conversation

About Grief:

- What surprised me most about grief after cancer?
- What did people misunderstand about my experience?
- What helped?
- What hurt?
- What support did I need that nobody offered?

About Healing:

- When did healing begin?
- Can healing coexist with ongoing fear?
- What does “living well” mean after cancer?

About Social Work:

- What do patients remember most?
- What do they forget?
- What small interactions made the biggest difference?

Things I Wish Patients Knew

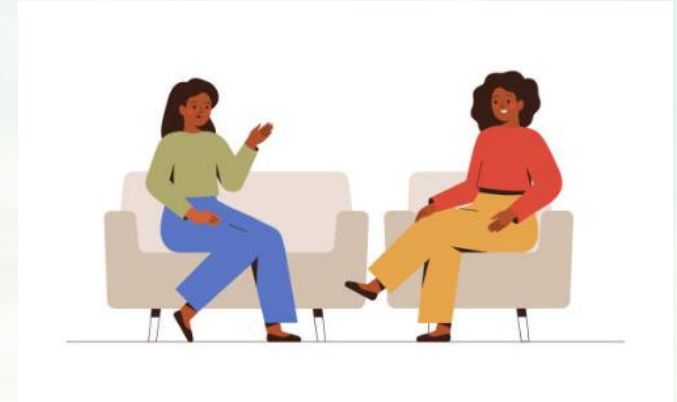
Handout #1

I wish patients knew...

I wish caregivers knew...

I wish healthcare teams knew...

I wish I remembered myself...



Reflection

Handout #2

What am I carrying?

What am I avoiding?

What am I grieving?


What am I grateful for?

What do I need more of?



We all have a bag.

We all pack differently. Some of us are traveling light. Some of us are secret hoarders who've never parted with a memory in our lives. I think we are all called to figure out how to carry our bag to the best of our ability, how to unpack it, and how to face the mess. I think part of growing up is learning how to sit down the floor with all your things and figuring out what to take with you and what to leave behind.

Hannah Brencher / Power of Words 



Closing Activity



Write one thing you are ready to release and one thing you want to carry forward.

References

- Acquati, C., Miller-Sonet, E., Zhang, A., & Ionescu, E. (2023). Social wellbeing in cancer survivorship: A cross-sectional analysis of self-reported relationship closeness and ambivalence from a community sample. *Current Oncology*, 30(2), 1720–1732. <https://doi.org/10.3390/currenocol30020133>
- Doherty, M., Miller-Sonet, E., Gardner, D., & Epstein, I. (2019). Exploring the role of psychosocial care in value-based oncology: Results from a survey of 3000 cancer patients and survivors. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 37(4), 441–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2018.1504851>
- Glaser, S., Knowles, K., & Damaskos, P. (2019). Survivor guilt in cancer survivorship. *Social Work in Health Care*, 58(8), 764–775. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2019.1640337>
- Greenblatt, A., & Lee, E. (2018). Cancer survivorship and identity: What about the role of oncology social workers? *Social Work in Health Care*, 57(10), 811–833. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2018.1521893>
- Hart, N. H., Nekhlyudov, L., Smith, T. J., Yee, J., Fitch, M. I., Crawford, G. B., Koczwara, B., & Ashbury, F. D. (2024). Survivorship care for people affected by advanced or metastatic cancer: MASCC-ASCO standards and practice recommendations. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 32, Article 313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-024-08465-8>
- McGue, S. R., Oswalt, C. J., Berger, B. T., Morgan, S. S., Barlow, S. A., Pieper, C. F., Sutton, L. M., Labriola, M. K., & Galanos, A. N. (2025). Grief among oncology providers: Prevalence and association with burnout. *Journal of Cancer Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-025-02615-0>
- Roberts, K. E., Jankauskaite, G., Slivjak, E., Rubin, L., Schachter, S., Stabler, S., Wiener, L., Prigerson, H. G., & Lichtenthal, W. G. (2020). Bereavement risk screening: A pathway to psychosocial oncology care. *Psycho-Oncology*, 29(12), 2041–2047. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.5526>
- Yi, J., Kim, M. A., Choi, K., Kim, S., & O'Connor, A. (2018). When does compassion fatigue hit social workers? Caring for oncology patients in Korea. *Qualitative Social Work*, 17(3), 346–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325016670484>
- Zebrack, B., Schapmire, T., Damaskos, P., Grignon, M., & Smith, S. K. (2024). The essential and evolving nature of oncology social work: Accomplishments and impact, 2010–present. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 42(6), 739–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2024.2404577>



Thank You



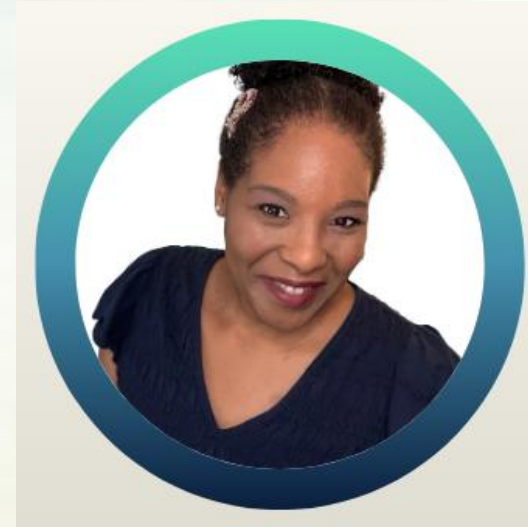
lpnelson76@gmail.com



Lisa Petgrave-Nelson



@diaryofablacksocialworker



meganclairec@gmail.com



Megan-Claire J. Chase



@warriormegsie



Q&A





Facing the In-Between: A Survivor-Social Worker Conversation on Grief and Healing Session with Lisa P. Nelson and Megan-Claire Chase

SESSION HANDOUT 1: Naming Grief in Oncology Social Work

When you hear the word *grief*, what comes to mind?

Write one word:

In oncology social work, grief often includes:

| | |
|-------------|----------|
| Loss | Anger |
| Identity | Waiting |
| Uncertainty | Meaning |
| Hope | Distress |

Reflection

In this work, grief is not occasional; it is cumulative, layered, and often unacknowledged.

It lives in:

- the patients you remember
- the outcomes you couldn't change
- the moments you had to keep going anyway



What Am I Grieving?

Today, I may be grieving:

- A patient
- A role or professional identity
- My sense of effectiveness
- My energy or capacity
- My sense of certainty
- A patient outcome I hoped for
- Relationships that changed
- Professional idealism
- Time (mine or my patients')
- Something else: _____

Reflection Question

Which one surprised you or felt hardest to admit? Why?



Facing the In-Between: A Survivor-Social Worker Conversation on Grief and Healing Session with Lisa P. Nelson and Megan-Claire Chase

SESSION HANDOUT 2: Invisible & Unspoken Grief in Clinical Practice

Invisible Losses Inventory

The losses my patients grieve but rarely say out loud:

The losses I carry as a social worker but rarely say out loud:

Reflection

What happens when grief has no space in clinical care?

What happens when *your* grief has no space at all?



Before / After

BEFORE

What I believed about this work: _____

What I expected to be able to do: _____

What felt certain: _____

AFTER

What changed: _____

What I've had to accept: _____

What still matters: _____

The Backpack Exercise

What am I carrying from this work right now?

Inside my backpack:

- Names I still remember
- Stories I can't forget
- Regrets
- Frustrations
- Moral distress
- Helplessness
- Exhaustion

AOSW 2026 

Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

#AOSW2026



Reflection

What is one thing that feels too heavy right now?

What would it look like to set it down—even briefly?



Facing the In-Between: A Survivor-Social Worker Conversation on Grief and Healing Session with Lisa P. Nelson and Megan-Claire Chase

Closing Activity: Meaning, Healing & Carrying Forward

Survivor–Social Worker Conversation

About Grief

- What surprised me most about grief after cancer?
 - What did people misunderstand about my experience?
 - What helped?
 - What hurt?
 - What support did I need that nobody offered?
-

About Healing

- When did healing begin?
 - Can healing coexist with ongoing fear?
 - What does “living well” mean after cancer?
-

About Social Work

- What do patients remember most?
 - What do they forget?
 - What small interactions made the biggest difference?
-

AOSW 2026 

Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

#AOSW2026



Things I Wish...

I wish patients knew...

I wish caregivers knew...

I wish healthcare teams knew...

I wish I remembered myself...

Reflection Card (Take Home)

Front

What am I carrying?

What am I avoiding?

What am I grieving?

What am I grateful for?

AOSW 2026

Annual Conference

June 10-12, 2026

Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront
Portland, Oregon USA

#AOSW2026



Back

What do I need more of?

- Rest
 - Community
 - Boundaries
 - Meaning
 - Hope
 - Permission
 - Compassion
 - Something else: _____
-
-

Closing Reflection

One thing I am ready to release:

One thing I want to carry forward:
