

Thanatology is the study of death and dying. Thanatologists look at things like the influence of social media on the grieving process, how people find meaning and how children understand traumatic death, to name a few. If it's connected to death or dying, there's probably a thanatologist studying it somewhere. Everyone experiences loss of some kind in life—whether it's the death of a loved one, the unexpected loss of a job, a divorce, a bankruptcy or a best friend who suddenly distances themselves from you. Some thanatologists (like me!) work to educate the public about death and dying so we can better navigate the bumps we will undoubtedly encounter on the road of life.

A Dose of Thanatology: Three Things To Know

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

This shows up anytime someone is grieving the loss of something, but society ignores it or implies that it's not valid.

For example, imagine that a parent has lost a son to suicide. Their chosen religious tradition teaches that those who die by suicide will go to hell. As such, their religious community does not offer support. The grief the parent is experiencing is disenfranchised because the religious community they belong to is not allowing a full expression of grief.

Disenfranchised grief pops up often with suicide, pet loss, miscarriage and the death of a divorced spouse.

DINODO DRAGONS

Ever wonder what people most often regret as they face death? More often than not, they regret the things they did not do and not necessarily the things they did do. That's right, we often regret what we **did not do**.

I call these Dinodo Dragons because they are large, can cause a lot of pain and exist only in our minds—much like an actual dragon.

So how do you avoid attracting a Dinodo Dragon? With action.

The first, and very smallest step is something you can do today, right now.

Talk about it.

Research shows that talking about the things you want to do, even if you never do them, can be as fulfilling as actually doing them.

THE AZALEA

When someone experiences a loss, we often want to express sympathy in a tangible way to offer support. Cards, flowers and meals are the usual means.

For something a little different, consider giving a small Azalea. The Azalea makes for a wonderful, brightly colored gift in times of loss. Pair it with a thoughtful note and you are on the way to supporting your loved one in their grief.

Historically, the Azalea was added to a bouquet or given as a gift to remind the recipient to take care of themselves. It's a loving reminder for the bereaved—it's hard to take good care of others without first taking care of ourselves.

The gift of a beautiful flower and a thoughtful message becomes magnified to the grieving heart. Your thoughtfulness in their time of sadness means most of all.

ETHNOBOTANY & THANATOLOGY

As part of my research fellowship, I've been delving into the fascinating world of ethnobotany—the study of the relationship between plants and people—and where that intersects with thanatology. I'm looking at how we have used plants to help us cope with grief, death and loss. **Fun Fact:** Did those little purple violets pop up in your lawn this spring? Those are edible and were used in Appalachian traditions to 'heal a broken heart.' Today, they are most often used on salads and in cocktails!

MY PODCAST

"Life, Death & Tarot"

Free wherever you listen to podcasts!

MY WEBSITE

AmericanThanatologist.com

cole@hellocole.com

WHAT I DO

I show you how to live a brighter life by embracing the light of loss.