

**Faculty of Health, Department of Psychology**  
**Course Director: Dr. Kathleen Fortune**  
**PSYC 3560, Section M: PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH AND DYING**  
**Thursdays 8:30-11:30am in Vari Hall Room C**  
**Winter Term (January to April, 2024)**

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Welcome to the Psychology of Death and Dying! I'm genuinely excited to be teaching this class again. Over the years, I've found it to be one of the most personally and professionally enriching courses to teach. I hope that by the end of the course, you will feel the same way.

When I tell my friends and colleagues that I'm teaching the Psychology of Death and Dying, their reactions are usually ones of horror. I try to explain that it is actually an incredibly life-affirming course, full of hope, laughter and joy, but the truth is, this course is also difficult. It is important that you know this going into it. We are going to talk about topics that are heavy and difficult, including topics that may be taboo in your family, culture, or religion. Many of us have been personally touched by loss and death, and perhaps that's why we are all here taking (or teaching) this course.

Each week, I'm going to push you out of your comfort zone. I'm going to teach this course with as much care and empathy as I can, but I'm not going to avoid the difficult topics, and I'm not going to let you avoid them either. Throughout the course, I'm going to share content that may be upsetting, and I'm going to offer perspectives that may directly challenge your own. If you're going to get the most out of this course, you're going to need to keep an open mind. Respect for diverse opinions and experiences must be maintained at all times (e.g., during lectures, in discussion forums, via email). We're here to learn from each other and that can only happen if the classroom is a safe space.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If you have recently experienced loss or death, I encourage you to think carefully about whether this is the right time for you to take this course. There is no shame in feeling like the wounds are too raw right now. I've been there. Many of us have been there. **Reflecting on your own experiences with loss and death is required in this course and you will not be able to opt out of an assignment because it is too emotional for you. This is the very nature of this course and I'm being transparent about it from the start to avoid issues later on. It is also important that you recognize that this course is not an opportunity (nor a substitute) for therapy.** I'm not a trained clinician, nor are your classmates. We can and will share our lived experiences and perspectives, but none of us can play the role of therapist for the other. Rather, this course is an opportunity to learn, listen, and reflect on death, dying, life, and living (yes, I totally ripped that line from the textbook title). Let's make it meaningful.

### **Instructor and Teaching Assistant Information**

Instructor: Dr. Kathleen Fortune

Office Hours: TBA

Email: kfortune@yorku.ca

<b>T.A.</b>	<b>Taran Virk</b>	<b>Jenna Barnhardt</b>
<b>Email</b>	taranv@my.yorku.ca	jrmb@yorku.ca
<b>Office Hours</b>	TBA	TBA

**Course Prerequisite(s): Course prerequisites are strictly enforced**

- HH/PSYC 1010 6.00 (Introduction to Psychology)
- **Completed at least 54 earned credits**

**Course Credit Exclusions**

Please refer to [York Courses Website](#) for a listing of any course credit exclusions.

**Course website: [eClass](#)**

All course materials will be available on the course eClass website. This includes my PowerPoint slides, as well as any supplementary readings, videos, and podcasts. The eClass page is organized by week, so all of the materials for any given week will be located within that module.

**Course Description**

This course is designed to provide you with a comprehensive introduction to empirical findings on death, dying and bereavement. It explores a range of psychological and social issues, including death anxiety, attitudes toward death, grief and bereavement, social and cultural contexts of death and loss, the mental life of the dying person, medical assistance in dying, and palliative and hospice care. Emphasis will be placed on the critical analysis and synthesis of the historical, sociocultural, biomedical and psychological research on these topics. The course will consider the experiences of the dying, those who care for the dying, and the experiences of the bereaved, left behind to cope with the loss.

**Program Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the psychology of death and dying.
2. Articulate trends in the psychology of death and dying literature.
3. Express psychological knowledge of death and dying in written form.
4. Describe and explain limits to generalizability of research findings in death and dying.
5. Demonstrate ability to relate information in the psychology of death and dying to own and others' life experiences.

**Specific Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, you will have:

- Developed analytical, reflective and critical thought around one's own and others' attitudes toward death, dying and bereavement.
- Become better prepared to deal with death, dying, and bereavement when they arise in your life and in the lives of those around you.
- Developed knowledge of advanced directives, living wills, power of attorney, organ donation, and other important decisions around end-of-life care.
- Developed practical, evidence-based skills that prepare you for careers that involve dealing with the sick, the dying, and the bereaved in a compassionate way.
- A deeper understanding and appreciation of your strengths and limitations as human beings. As Plato said, "The really important thing is not to live, but to live well." I hope this course plays some small part in helping you live well.

## Required Textbook

Corr, Corr, & Doka (2019). *Death & Dying, Life & Living*, 8th Edition. Cengage.

You can purchase a copy of this book from Cengage:

<https://www.cengage.ca/c/death-and-dying-life-and-living-8e-corr-corr-doka/9781337563895/>

or through in the York University bookstore. You can also use the bookstore's **Day1Digital option**, available through our eClass page in the first week of class. This allows you a 14-day trial option of the ebook and then a significantly reduced ebook price, charged to your student account.

## Course Requirements and Assessment:

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
Lossography Assignment	February 8, 2024	20%
Test 1	February 15, 2024	25%
Research Paper Assignment	March 21, 2024	25%
Test 2	April 4, 2024	20%
Discussion Forums	Throughout term (4 X 2% each)	8%
Academic Honesty Quiz Completion	March 20 (but can submit before then)	2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

## Description of Assignments

**Tests:** There are 2 term tests in the course and no final exam in exam period. Each test will be made up of approximately 70-80 multiple-choice questions based on the textbook and lecture material, as well as any indicated supplementary materials posted to eClass.

**Discussion Forums:** Four times over the term you will be asked to respond to a discussion forum post (e.g., an article, video or podcast). You will also be asked to reply to at least one of your classmates' posts, with a thoughtful response that extends the conversation, challenges a perspective, etc. Posts are graded on effort and critical reflection, rather than accuracy. If you put in the effort and complete your posts and replies on time, these are 'easy' marks. The posts are worth 2% each, for a total of 8%.

**Lossography:** You will be asked to reflect on your past experiences with loss and/or death and to draw connections between those experiences, and the person that you are today. If you have never experienced a significant death, you can reflect on other losses you may have experienced (e.g., loss of a home because of migration, prenatal loss, loss of a significant relationship, parental divorce, etc.). You can speak to me or to your TA about an alternate focus for your assignment, if you have not experienced a significant loss in your life. I'll provide a more detailed rubric for this assignment, but for now, start thinking about the losses that you have experienced in your lifetime and how you think they have influenced you. The lossography assignment is due early in the term, but it is relatively short at 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages, and it is worth 20% of your course grade.

**Research Paper:** Many of you have taken courses with me before, so you know that I believe that developing writing and research skills is crucial for students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of university. In keeping with that, I've decided to include a more formal research paper into this course this year. There are so many interesting topics to write on that relate to death, dying, and grief, so I reached out to former students and TA's for their ideas in order to help me shape the potential topic choices. I've settled on 4 possible topics that you will be able to choose from: 1) Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), including recent controversies around changes to the laws to include deaths that are not imminently

foreseeable, as well the inclusion of mental illness as a sole reason to request MAID; 2) exploring the concept of a “good death” by considering how and where most people die here in North America today, as well as what changes can be made to give more people their version of a “good death”(e.g., hospice and palliative care design; home care/home death, death doulas; 3) disenfranchised and stigmatized deaths, such as death by suicide or overdose and how these may contribute to complicated grief; 4) the funeral industrial complex, as it is often called. The ways in which the services provided after death have been commercialized and how that is shaping the experience for loved ones. Within this final topic, you must include a section on the movement toward ‘green’ funeral and burial practices. I will share a more detailed breakdown for this assignment in the coming weeks, but I wanted to put those topics out there early, so that you can get thinking and researching them as soon as possible. This assignment will require you to find recent peer-reviewed journal articles using York’s online databases, and to condense from those journal articles, the main ideas/findings. The textbook cannot be used, nor can my lectures slides. I’m adamant that this be about you going to the literature (which is vast!) and finding relevant work, and then paraphrasing it to support the main arguments in your paper. This paper will be longer, at 6-7 typed, double-spaced pages in APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition format, and will be worth 25% of your course grade. My advice is to start early and to seek clarification from your TA along the way.

### **Class Format and Attendance Policy**

No attendance will be taken, but you will not get as much out of the course if you don’t attend lectures. Unlike my other courses, **I will NOT be recording lectures in this class.** I appreciate that these recordings offer some students flexibility, but given the nature of our discussions in this course, I do not feel it is appropriate to record these lectures. I want this to be a safe classroom environment in which all students can share their experiences, fears, beliefs, around death, dying, and grief, without concern over where the recordings might end up. If you registered for this in-person course and were not planning to attend lectures, this is not the class for you. If you miss a lecture due to illness or caregiving responsibilities, you have my PowerPoint slides and the textbook readings. You can also befriend a classmate and ask them for their notes on the lecture you missed.

### **Grading as per Senate Policy**

The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and tests\* will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 89, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.) For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar – [Grading Scheme for 2023-24](#)

### **Missed Tests/Late Assignments**

For any missed test or late assignment, students MUST complete the missed test form using the following online form: [HH PSYC: Missed Tests/Exams Form](#). You should put my email in the course director field (not your TA). These forms are received and reviewed by me and by the Psychology Undergraduate Program office. The department keeps track of how often students are missing assignments and tests, and we will reach out to students who chronically miss these deadlines to find out what is at the root of this issue. At this time, due to COVID-19 an Attending Physician’s Statement (APS) is not required, however, a **legitimate reason for missing an evaluated component in the course must be provided. Failure to complete the form within 48 hours of the original deadline will result in a grade of zero for the missed quiz or late assignment.**

**Make-up tests:** Students who are ill and who have completed the missed test form within the 48 hours stated, may be given the chance to write a make-up test at a date and time specified by the instructor.

Please note that the make-up test may not be the same as the original test and may be given in an alternative format, such as short answer questions. **Please also note, any student who misses more than one test will NOT be granted a second make-up test opportunity.** Given that there are only two tests in this course, there is no excuse for missing both tests.

### Late Assignments:

**Both written assignments have a 2-day grace period after the official due date**, during which students can submit without late penalty. This should not be considered a new deadline. This is put in place in the rare instance that you are falling behind and need an additional day or two. **Assignments submitted beyond this 2-day grace period will receive a 10% per day penalty up to a total of 3 days (e.g., up to 5 days after original deadline).** **No assignments will be accepted 5 days beyond their due date.** **Assignments more than 5 days late will receive a grade of 0.**

### Add/Drop Deadlines

For a list of all important dates please refer to [Undergraduate Fall/Winter 2023-2024 Important Dates](#)

	Fall (Term F)	Year (Term Y)	Winter (Term W)
Last date to add a course <b>without permission</b> of instructor (also see Financial Deadlines)	September 20	September 20	January 22
Last date to add a course <b>with permission</b> of instructor (also see Financial Deadlines)	September 28	September 28	January 31
Drop deadline: Last date to drop a course without receiving a grade (also see Financial Deadlines)	November 8	February 8	March 11
Course Withdrawal Period (withdraw from a course and receive a grade of "W" on transcript – see note below)	November 9 – December 5	February 9- April 8	March 12- April 8

### Add and Drop Deadline Information

There are deadlines for adding and dropping courses, both academic and financial. Since, for the most part, the dates are **different**, be sure to read the information carefully so that you understand the differences between the sessional dates below and the [Refund Tables](#).

You are strongly advised to pay close attention to the "Last date to enrol without permission of course instructor" deadlines. These deadlines represent the last date students have unrestricted access to the registration and enrolment system. After that date, you must contact the professor/department offering the course to arrange permission. You can drop courses using the registration and enrolment system up until the last date to drop a course without receiving a grade (drop deadline). You may [withdraw from a course](#) using the registration and enrolment system after the drop deadline until the last day of class for the term associated with the course. When you withdraw from a course, the course remains on your transcript without a grade and is notated as 'W'. The withdrawal will not affect your grade point average or count towards the credits required for your degree.

### Information on Plagiarism Detection

Written assignments will be submitted to Turnitin via an eClass submission folder. Turnitin is software that detects plagiarism in a variety of forms. It provides instructors with a similarity score and a detailed

breakdown that shows where the material you submitted in your paper has been taken from. I set this up so that students can review their similarity score before final submissions are due by submitting their draft up to three times before the due date. This gives students a chance to correct any issues with improper citation or failure to cite sources. Please review the Senate Policy on Academic Integrity in the section on Academic Integrity below, and familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism, in order to ensure that your assignment submissions are not in violation of these rules. If you have any questions, it is your responsibility to email your TA. Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse, nor is the statement that you did not *intend* to plagiarize anything. I take academic integrity very seriously and I will pursue every academic honesty violation to the fullest extent possible.

**In keeping with this, I'm assigning 2% of your grade to the successful completion of this Academic Honesty Quiz with a score of 100%, no later than March 20, 2024.**

Review Academic Integrity by completing the [Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) and [Academic Honesty Quiz](#)

### **Electronic Device Policy**

I know that many of you take notes on your laptops during lecture. I have no issue with this. However, if you are using your laptop or phone for purposes other than taking notes, and this is distracting to myself or to your classmates, I will ask you to leave the classroom. It's unfortunate that I even have to state this, but in a course like the Psychology of Death and Dying, sitting on your computer watching TikTok videos or YouTube videos is disrespectful and unacceptable.

### **Academic Integrity for Students**

York University takes academic integrity very seriously; please familiarize yourself with [Information about the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty](#).

Review Academic Integrity by completing the [Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) and [Academic Honesty Quiz](#)

### **Test Banks**

The offering for sale of, buying of, and attempting to sell or buy test banks (banks of test questions and/or answers), or any course specific test questions/answers is not permitted in the Faculty of Health. Any student found to be doing this may be considered to have breached the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty. In particular, buying and attempting to sell banks of test questions and/or answers may be considered as "Cheating in an attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation" (article 2.1.1 from the Senate Policy) and/or "encouraging, enabling or causing others" (article 2.1.10 from the Senate Policy) to cheat.

### **Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

While all individuals are expected to satisfy the requirements of their program of study and to aspire to do so at a level of excellence, the university recognizes that persons with disabilities may require reasonable accommodation to enable them to do so. The university encourages students with disabilities to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to discuss their accommodation needs as early as possible in the term to establish the recommended academic accommodations that will be communicated to Course Directors as necessary. **Please let me know as early as possible in the term if you anticipate requiring academic accommodation, so that we can discuss how to consider your accommodation needs within the context of this course.**

<https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/>

### Excerpt from Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

1. Pursuant to its commitment to sustaining an inclusive, equitable community in which all members are treated with respect and dignity, and consistent with applicable accessibility legislation, York University shall make reasonable and appropriate accommodations in order to promote the ability of students with disabilities to fulfill the academic requirements of their programs. This policy aims to eliminate systemic barriers to participation in academic activities by students with disabilities.

All students are expected to satisfy the essential learning outcomes of courses. Accommodations shall be consistent with, support and preserve the academic integrity of the curriculum and the academic standards of courses and programs. For further information please refer to: [York University Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy](#).

### Course Materials Copyright Information

These course materials are designed for use as part of the **PSYC3560 course at York University and are the property of the instructor. This means that my PowerPoint slides should not be posted to websites by you. These slides are my intellectual property and shared with you for the purposes of this course only.** Third party copyrighted materials (such as book chapters, journal articles, music, videos, etc.) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian Copyright law. Copying this material for distribution (e.g. uploading material to a commercial third-party website) may lead to a violation of Copyright law. [Intellectual Property Rights Statement](#).

### Email Policy

When writing an email to me or to your TA, think carefully about the kind of impression you want to create. Most of you are likely aiming to make a lasting, positive impression and to receive a favourable response. However, sending such an email may be new to you, so below are some helpful tips to review before sending an email.

1. Any emails sent to the professor or teaching assistant **MUST** indicate the course number and section in the subject line of the email. Our course and section are **PSYC3560, SEC M**.
2. Make sure to **include your full name and student number in the body of the email. If your preferred name differs from the name listed on the course roster, please let us know.**
3. **Before sending an email, make sure you've done a thorough job of trying to find the answer to your question in the materials posted to eClass.** That means carefully reading the course outline and other information posted on eClass to see if the answer is already provided. We receive a high volume of emails and we **will not respond to emails asking questions that are clearly addressed in the materials.**
4. A proper email to your professor or TA begins by **properly addressing them by their full name and/or title. In this case, you should address me as Dr. Fortune or Professor Fortune, not Kathleen or Miss. You can address emails to your TA's by their first name.** Your email should be written in a polite tone. Respect goes both ways, and you should treat your professor and TA's with the same respect with which you would like to be treated.
5. Send emails well in advance of when a response is required. While the volume of emails received will vary throughout the year, **you should expect to receive a response with 3 days** of sending an email. If you have not received a response within that period, follow-up politely. Emails sent after regular work hours or on weekends, may receive a slower response. **Your work hours may not be mine, nor the TA's, so keep that in mind when sending an email.**



## Discussion Board Etiquette

I love discussion board posts, because they allow you to share your thoughts, feelings, and questions about interesting aspects of the course with one another. However, this only works when everyone understands some general rules around appropriate behaviour on these boards. They must be a safe space for everyone, and the TA's and myself will ensure that they remain so. Read the guidelines below, to familiarize yourself with our expectations around discussion board behaviour.

- **Respect others.** It is important to remember that you, your peers, and the teaching team are real people who are affected by what you write. It is important to be mindful of the feelings and opinions of others, even if they differ from your own. As a general rule of thumb: If you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't say it online either.
- **Proofread.** Before sending an email, sending a message to a chat or responding to a discussion, review your response to ensure that it is clear, concise and respectful.
- **Avoid strong language, all caps, and excessive exclamation points.** It is easy for written text to be misread and misunderstood. Have you ever sent a text or email message with good intent, but your recipient thought you were being rude or condescending? If so, you have experienced this firsthand.
- **Pick the right tone, be careful with humour or sarcasm.** Since your communication will be in a written format then it is very important to choose the right words when you are trying to get your meaning across. Be cautious using humour or sarcasm, as tone is often lost in discussion posts.
- **Personal information and confidentiality.** Do not post confidential information about yourself or others in the discussion boards. You are, of course, free to share your perspectives and experiences, if they are relevant to the question being posed, but keep in mind that the board is viewed by your classmates and potentially others. I defer to your own comfort level with sharing this information, recognizing that we are all different when it comes to this. Do not share others' posts outside the class in any manner, as this could represent a violation of York's student code of conduct.

## Course Schedule

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNED READINGS
JAN 11	Death education & the changing nature of death and dying, dying trajectories.	Chapter 1 (pgs. 1-16) Chapter 2 (pgs. 21-44) Collective grief reading (Kessler) TED Talk: Let's Talk About Death (Dr. Saul)
JAN 18	Attitudes toward death, death anxiety, language around death, death in the media	Chapter 3 (pgs. 52-59) & Chapter 4 (pgs. 67-71 & 88-95)
JAN 25	Developmental Perspectives: how children and adolescents learn about death & death of children and adolescents	Chapter 12 (pgs. 328-356) & Chapters 13 (pgs. 368-380) Discussing Death with Children reading (Kronaizl)



FEB 1	Living with life-threatening illness & coping with dying: how individuals can help	Chapter 6 (pgs. 131-151) & Chapter 7 (pgs. 153-177)
FEB 8	Coping with dying: How <b>formal institutions</b> can help with end-of-life care, hospice and palliative care  <b>Assignment #1 Due Today!</b>	Chapter 8 (pgs. 181-196, 201-204)
FEB 15	<b>TEST #1 TODAY</b>	Covers chapters and lectures from Jan 11 to Feb 14
FEB 22	<b>READING WEEK BREAK – NO CLASS</b>	<b>NO ASSIGNED READINGS</b>
FEB 29	How medical professionals, families, and the dying communicate about options at the end of life (advanced directives, organ donation, MAID)	Chapter 16 (pgs. 448-466) Grief-bereavement after MAID reading (Beuthin et al.)
MAR 7	Understanding grief: dominant models of grief and coping, a critical look at stage-models of grief, how their intuitive appeal can exacerbate grieving	Chapter 9 (pgs. 212-255)
MAR 14	How adults experience death of a friend, spouse, child, or parent.	Chapter 14 (pgs. 400-416) and Chapter 15 (pgs. 422-439)
MAR 21	The unique challenges associated with death by suicide, as well as homicide (e.g., complicated grief, disenfranchised grief, stigma) <b>Assignment 2 DUE TODAY</b>	Chapter 10 (pgs. 261-263) Chapter 17 (pgs. 487-506) Chapter 13 (pgs. 383-385)
MAR 28	How culture/religion/rituals influence our experience of death and grief; meaning making and post-traumatic growth after loss.	Readings will be provided (TBD)
APR 4	<b>TEST #2 TODAY!</b>	Covers only readings and lectures since Test 1