

Grief and Loss in Addiction & Recovery

Personal Awareness, Theories,
Grief Reactions, and What Helps

Overview

- Why talk about grief
- Why we experience grief
- Grief Theories
- Grief in Addiction
- Grief in Recovery
- What Helps



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Grief

TALKING ABOUT GRIEF IS IMPORTANT

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Why talk about Grief?

- Change happens!
- To live is to experience loss
- “Little deaths”
- **“Change is *Inevitable*—Growth is *Optional*.”**
- Walt Disney

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Why talk about Grief?

“Working through our endings allows us to
redefine our relationships,
to surrender what is dead and to accept what is
alive,
and to be in the world more fully to face the new
situation.”



- Stanley Keleman

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Grief

WHY WE EXPERIENCE GRIEF

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Attachment Theory

- Types of Attachments
 - Secure
 - Avoidant
 - Anxious

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Persons

- Persons have personality and character
- A person has a past
- A person has a cultural background
- A person has roles
- No person exists without others
- A person is a political being
- Persons do things
- Persons have regular behaviors
- Every person has a body
- Everyone has a secret life
- Everyone has a perceived future
- Everyone has a transcendent dimension

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Types of Losses

- Loss of...
 - limb, mobility, function
 - independence
 - health status
 - employment
 - drug of choice
 - relationships
 - political agency
 - self-image/identity
 - integrity
 - role(s)
 - "normal"
 - future plans/expectations
 - control over one's schedule
 - faith
- Death

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OUR RESPONSE

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Grief Responses

- Bio-psycho-social-spiritual persons have
 - Emotional
 - Mental
 - Social
 - Spiritual
 - Physical

...response to loss

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Normal Grief Reactions

- Emotional
- Physical
- Cognitive

- Behavioral
- Spiritual

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Uniqueness of Loss & Grief Response



- Some broad similarities BUT...
 - Perception is key
 - Individual response
 - Frequency of exposure
 - Social support

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Myths & Facts

- The pain of the loss will go away faster if I ignore it.
- It's important to be "be strong" in the face of loss.
- If I don't cry, it means I'm not sorry about the loss.
- Grief lasts about a year.

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THEORIES

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E. Kubler-Ross

The five stages of grief:

1. **Denial/Shock/Disbelief:** *"This can't be happening."*
 - Failure to acknowledge the facts, disbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence.
2. **Anger:** *"Why is this happening? Who is to blame? What should have been done differently..."*
 - It can't be true, someone is lying.
3. **Bargaining:** *"Make this not happen, in return I will ____."*
 - If I do x there will be a postponement of what seems to be inevitable.
4. **Depression:** *"I'm so sad."*
 - The sense of great loss; the reduction of the self-image; the realization of one's own shattered vulnerability and mortality.
5. **Acceptance:** *"I'm able to exist with what happened."*
 - The inevitable will come no matter what is done; it must be faced.

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Stroebe & Schut

Dual Process Model:

- Oscillating between a 'Loss-oriented' state and a 'Restoration-oriented' state
 - **Loss-oriented:** more emotional work of grief
 - **Restoration-oriented:** more task-focused grief work
- 'Adaptive denial and distraction' from the emotional work of grief

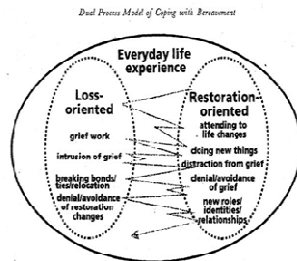


FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

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Martin & Doka



- Grieving Styles: contrasting patterns of grieving and mourning
- Patterns which are not related solely to gender, but to 'style' of mourning
 - **Intuitive** – emphasizing the experiencing and expression of emotion
 - **Instrumental** – focuses on practical matters and problem solving
- These contrasting styles are poles on a spectrum or continuum
- Related more to socialization and personality types than to gender

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J. William Worden

- Physiological healing is needed to bring the body back into physical health – this type of healing takes time.
- Similarly, after a loss it takes time to return to an emotional state of well-being.
- The **4 tasks** of mourning are an essential part of the healing process.
- No specific order, but still must be **worked** through during the time of grieving.

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The 4 Tasks of Mourning



1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. Experience and work through the pain of grief
3. Adjust to the new "normal"; life without what was lost
4. Emotionally relocate the loss and move forward in life

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Accept the Reality

- To come full face with the fact that your loss is real and will not return, i.e. immediate reunion or regaining it is impossible.
- **Obstacles:**
 - Denying the facts of loss.
 - Denying the meaning of the loss, e.g. "It wasn't a good job anyway", or "I don't miss him," or "I'm just as healthy as I ever was."
 - Minimizing the loss. "It's not that big of a deal."

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Experience & Work Through the Pain

- It is impossible to lose something or someone you have been deeply attached to without experiencing some level of pain.
- **Obstacles:**
 - Not allowing yourself to feel.
 - Cutting off your feelings and denying that pain is present.
 - Avoiding reminders of the loss – e.g., trying to find a 'geographic cure' by moving to another location, or travelling

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The New "Normal"

- Coming to terms with being without (maybe raising children alone, facing future unemployment or handicap, redefinition of self, etc.).
 - External Adjustments:** how the loss affects your everyday functioning in the world
 - Internal Adjustments:** how the loss affects your sense of self
 - Spiritual Adjustments:** how the loss affects your beliefs, values and assumptions about the world
- **Obstacles:**
 - Promoting your own helplessness.
 - Not developing the skills you need to cope or to function in new roles.
 - Withdrawing from the world. Refusing to see yourself or the world differently.

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Moving Forward

- To find a place for what was lost that will enable us to remain connected with them/it but in a way that will not keep us from going on with life.
- **Obstacles:**
 - Withdrawal from others and life.
 - Unwillingness to love or be healthily vulnerable.
 - Unwillingness to risk; making a vow to never invest yourself again.
 - Holding on so tight to the past that you're unable to form new relationships or develop new skills.

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"To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness."

- Dr. Erich Fromm

Grief

IN ADDICTION

Loss in Addiction

- Unresolved grief, loss & trauma often predate use
- Compounded in addiction
- Complicated by use

Loss in Addiction

- Minimized
- Normalized
- Numb / disassociate

Loss of Self...



Grief in Addiction

- Use AOD to cope
- Lack healthy support
- Medicate / Avoid / Minimize feelings
- Grief not processed
- Losses not *fully* grieved

Examples of Losses in Addiction

- Experiences and events
- Relationships with family/friends
- Parenting time
- Family milestones
- Deaths/communal expressions of grief
- Time
- Opportunities
- Perinatal
- Spiritual

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IN RECOVERY

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Grieving is Necessary!

“Man, when he does not grieve, hardly exists.”

- Antonio Porchia



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Losses in moving from addiction to recovery...

“What are you leaving behind?”



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Loss of drug (s) ...



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Loss of Rituals, etc...



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In early recovery people begin to realize that they have lost a lot...

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"... If you're an addict on the road to recovery, be prepared to experience emotions in a new way – the good and bad; and be sure to have a plan in place to fight off the cravings while you're in that vulnerable state."

–Michael Bloch

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Barriers to Grieving

- Lack of safety/ trust
- Unable to feel / identify feelings /unable to verbalize
- Feelings unfreeze - feel overwhelming
- Seemingly unrelated feelings may arise (anger, depression, anxiety)
- Lack of social support

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Barriers to Grieving

- Lack of healthy coping skills
- *Complicated by* guilt/shame/ stigma/ trauma
- Avoidance
 - Inability or unwillingness to grieve can be a barrier to recovery/getting well/ building relationships

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Recovery is a Process

- Grief work, like addiction recovery, is not a linear process
- In recovery people acknowledge, understand, and accept losses and move through grief



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Some Tasks in Recovery

- Develop skills to cope with feelings
- Open up, identify and talk about losses
- Learn to identify feelings
- Learn to verbalize feelings
- Learn to tolerate "negative" feelings
- Get necessary social support
- Develop new attachments

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Develop New Rituals



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Recovery Offers:

Opportunity to grieve lost relationships, heal old ones, build new ones and make meaning of past by helping others



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Recovery Offers:

Opportunity to connect / reconnect with one's spiritual self and to grow spiritually



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FAMILY & LOVED ONES

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“The reaction to loss that is widely experienced by friends and family members of persons who are addicted to mind altering substances is profound grief. It has characteristics of flawed interactional patterns because the loss is ambiguous. If a person dies, the grief is unambiguous: the social role the deceased played is no longer occupied and the deceased cannot fulfill obligations or promises. The spouse who becomes addicted to mind altering substances often ceases to fulfill obligations or promises, but physically the social role is still occupied.”

-Vicki Loyer-Carlson, Ph.D., LMFT

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- ### Losses May Include
- Relationships
 - Financial security
 - Hopes and dreams
 - Self-esteem
 - Social standing
 - Emotional support, “presence”
 - Other important tangible and intangible things
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Complicated Losses

- Painful experiences/memories
- Complex feelings (resentment, anger)
- Stigma, secrecy, shame
- Loss of contact by choice
- Incarceration
- Death

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Tensions for Families

- Despair ←————→ Hope
- Denial ←————→ Acceptance
- Meaninglessness ←————→ Meaningfulness
- Independence ←————→ Accepting Interdependence
- Ambiguity ←————→ Certainty of Outcome
- Making Plans ←————→ Experiencing Emotions
- Holding On ←————→ Letting Go
- Not Talking ←————→ Speaking Openly
- Family as it Was ←————→ Family as it is Becoming

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Grief feels lonely for family and friends and circumstances may be especially challenging - but help, support and understanding is available, and healing is possible



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Grief recovery is hard work for family and friends too – but it is worth the effort!

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WHAT HELPS

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“The best therapy for grief is time and community.”

-Michael S. Logan


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Getting Support When You Are Grieving

- Do not grieve alone
- Face your feelings
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way
- Look after your physical health



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Social support Help from community ...




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- A safe place to be open about feelings and experiences, without shame
- Step work helps people express grief, gain perspective and acceptance, forgive and move on with their lives
- Provides opportunities to give back to others and make meaning

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Support from family/friends/others ...



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Support

- Let family/friends/coworkers/others know what you need
- Support can dissipate over time - continue to ask for support
- If family/friends are unavailable or unsupportive (including well-intentioned but misguided efforts to be supportive) –seek support elsewhere

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Spiritual support



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Rituals

Grief rituals and ceremonies acknowledge the pain of loss while offering social support and a reaffirmation of life ...



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Tributes

- Creating a tribute, legacy or memorial to honor and remember a loved one can provide comfort
- People often find comfort in donating to a related cause and/or becoming involved in volunteer or service work, or other ways of helping others



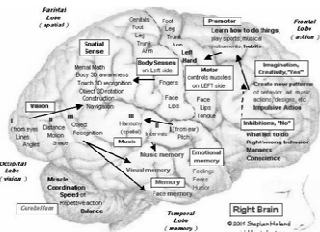
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Experiential Techniques

experiential therapies (art, writing, music) engage areas of the brain involved in grief, memory, healing, recovery



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Self-care



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Know Your Grief Triggers



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Triggering Events

- Anniversaries
- National tragedies
- Others having a similar experience
- Holidays
- _____
- _____
- _____

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Take Action

- Identify sources of support
- Talk about it
- Plan ahead (more meetings, more social contact, more service work, more spiritual practice etc...)
- Identify healthy, helpful alternatives

Grief

GIVING SUPPORT

Helping Someone who is Grieving



- Listen
- Acknowledge the uniqueness of grief
- Offer practical help
- Make contact, write a personal note
- Be aware of holidays and anniversaries

“Grief heals when it is received by a caring other.”

- Wendy Lustbader

Grief


HEALING

When is Grief Healed?

- When a person can think of what was lost without acute pain?
- When the tasks of mourning have been accomplished?
- When one can think of the what was lost without physical manifestations such as crying or feeling tightness in the chest?
- When one can reinvest his/her emotions into life and the living?
- When one can regain an interest in life, feel more hopeful, experience healthy gratification again, and adapt to new roles?
- Is there a time limit? 1 year? 4 seasons? 2 years?


When Grief Isn't Healing

- Relational Factors
- Circumstantial Factors
- Historical Factors
- Personality Factors
- Social Factors



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When Grief Isn't Healing




- Chronic grief
- Delayed grief reactions
- Avoiding grieving

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Grief vs. Depression

Grief is a roller coaster.




Depression is dead end.

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Grief WORK

- Grief therapy: goal is not about forgetting but remembering with less pain.
- Developing adaptive coping mechanisms.
- Finding meaning.
- AA and Al-Anon, NA and Nar-Anon = grief work



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Taking Hold

“Grieving allows us to heal, to remember with love rather than pain.
It is a sorting process.
One by one you let go of things that are gone and you mourn for them.
One by one you take hold
of the things that have become a part of who you are and build again.”

- Rachael Naomi Remen

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