


Grief & Loss in Addiction & Recovery

Theory, Personal Awareness,
Grief Reactions, & What Helps

Overview

- Why Talk About Grief?
- Personal Awareness
- Grief Theories
- Grief Reactions
- What Helps



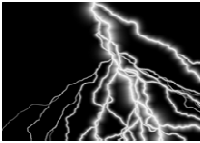

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What's the first thing you think of when I say the word "grief"?

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"Grief"

- Loss?
- Sadness?
- Separation?
- Anguish?
- Change?
- Ache?
- Hurt?

- Stages?
- Tasks?
- Symptoms?
- Adaptive?
- Normal?
- Complicated?
- Pathological?

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Grief is an...

- Emotional
- Mental
- Social
- Spiritual
- Physical

...response to loss

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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 do we feel Grief?

- Attachment Theory
- Types of Attachments
 - Secure
 - Avoidant
 - Anxious
 - Ambivalent

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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

(from Living Your Dying)

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Personal Awareness of Grief & Loss

- Perception is Key
- Individual Response
- Frequency of Exposure

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Myths About Grief

- **Myth:** The pain of the loss will go away faster if you ignore it.
- **Myth:** It’s important to be “be strong” in the face of loss.
- **Myth:** If you don’t cry, it means you aren’t sorry about the loss.
- **Myth:** Grief should last about a year.

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Facts About Grief

- **Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run.
- **Fact:** Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Showing your true feelings can help you and others deal with the grief.
- **Fact:** Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it’s not the only one.
- **Fact:** There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving.

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Kubler-Ross

The five stages of grief:

1. **Denial/Shock:** “This can’t be happening to me.”
2. **Anger:** “*Why* is this happening? Who is to blame? What should have been done differently...”
3. **Bargaining:** “Make this not happen, and in return I will ____.”
4. **Depression:** “I’m too sad to do anything.”
5. **Acceptance:** “I’m able to exist with what happened.”

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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

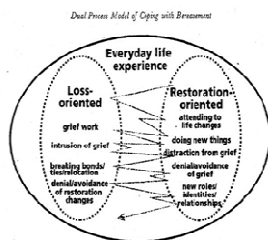


FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

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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. that 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.).
 - A. **External Adjustments** : how the loss affects your everyday functioning in the world
 - B. **Internal Adjustments**: how the loss affects your sense of self
 - C. **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.
 - 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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When is Grieving Over?


- 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 gratification again, and adapt to new roles.
- Is there a time limit? 1 year? 4 seasons? 2 years? It depends.

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Grieving is Necessary!


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

- Antonio Porchia




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Normal Grief Reactions




- Emotional
- Physical
- Cognitive
- Behavioral
- Spiritual



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Grief vs. Depression

Grief is a roller coaster.



Depression is dead end.

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Tensions for Families

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

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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 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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Getting Support When You Are Grieving

- Do not grieve alone
 - Turn to friends and family members
 - Join a support group
 - Talk to a therapist or grief counselor
- Face your feelings
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.
- Look after your physical health.
- Plan ahead for grief “triggers”.



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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

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

- Wendy Lustbader

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Resources

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Grief and Loss in Addiction and Recovery

Matt Statman, LLMSW, CADC

Dawn Farm
Education
Series



September
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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

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

Loss in Addiction

- Minimized
- Normalized
- Numb / disassociate

Grief in addiction

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

Examples of Losses in Addiction

- o Experiences and events
- o Relationships with family/friends
- o Parenting time
- o Family milestones
- o Deaths
- o Time
- o Opportunities
- o Perinatal
- o Spiritual

Losses in moving from addiction to recovery...
"What are you leaving behind?"



Loss of drug (s) ...



- o Relationship with substance is primary
- o Constant reminders of this loss in early recovery
- o Important loss that can easily be minimized

Loss of self...



- o Early onset - identity formed around AOD –
You have to give up who you are to become who you can be
- o Addiction forces people to live outside their values - guilt and shame
- o Loss of hopes, plans, aspirations and dreams
- o Loss of innocence, dignity, self-esteem, choice, control of one's body

Loss of rituals etc...



- o Loss over rituals “ The lifestyle”
- o Loss of coping mechanisms and survival techniques
- o Loss of culture of addiction
- o Loss of using friends / relatives
- o Etc...

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

Barriers to Grieving

- o Unable to feel / identify feelings
- o Feelings unfreeze - feel overwhelming
- o Seemingly unrelated feelings may arise (anger, depression, anxiety)
- o *Complicated by* guilt/shame/stigma/ trauma

Feelings - Early Recovery

- o Unable to verbalize
- o Lack healthy coping skills
- o May seek relief through compulsive behaviors/ other addictions / relapse

Avoidance

Inability or unwillingness to grieve can be a barrier to recovery/getting well/building relationships

“... 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

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

–Michael S. Logan

Recovery is a Process

Grief recovery is not a linear process



In recovery people acknowledge, understand, and accept losses and move through grief

- o Safe and supportive environment
- o Community
- o Additional support

Some Tasks

- 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

Grief recovery ...

- Healthy grieving enables the recovering person to confront and accept the reality of the loss, and find purpose and meaning for life
- Losses are eventually remembered with less pain.

Things will get better



Recovery offers opportunities to find meaning and purpose, rediscover and redefine oneself, and find true belonging in a supportive community

New Rituals



Opportunity to grieve lost relationships, heal old ones and build new ones



Hope for the future as well as opportunity to make meaning of past experiences and to use them to help others

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



“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

Losses may include

- o Relationships
- o Financial security
- o Hopes and dreams
- o Self-esteem
- o Emotional support, “presence”
- o Other important tangible and intangible things

Complicated

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

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



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

Grief triggers



**Being triggered is normal
and OK**
**Grief recovery, like
addiction recovery, is
ongoing**

Triggering Events

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

Take Action

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

Social support **Help from community ...**



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

Support from family/friends/others ...



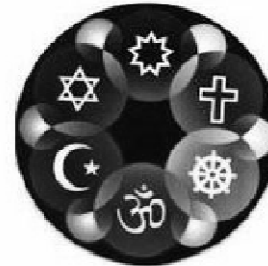
Helpers

- o It's ok / important to just be there / sit / listen
- o Avoid trying to fix - It's ok to say "This sucks!" or "I am so sorry!"
- o If it is out of your league refer to professionals

Grievors

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

Spiritual support



- o Participation in faith community activities/rituals
- o Faith-based support groups or prayer groups
- o Prayer, mindfulness, meditation
- o One's chosen spiritual practices and rituals

Rituals ...

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



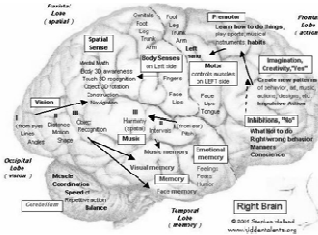
Tributes ...

- o Creating a tribute, legacy or memorial to honor and remember a loved one can provide comfort
- o 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



Experiential techniques ...

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



Self care ...



- o Participation in mutual aid groups / social support
- o Nutrition
- o Exercise
- o Adequate rest and sleep
- o Activities to engage in that help with healing and regaining a feeling of purpose
- o Internet resources
- o Literature

Professional Help

- Complicated grief may require extra help
- Resources are available

THE END

Barb Smith

Author of "Brent's World"

