

LOSS, GRIEF, AND BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

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**“WHAT LIES BEHIND US
AND WHAT LIES BEFORE US
ARE TINY MATTERS
COMPARED TO
WHAT LIES WITHIN US”**

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Tasks of Mourning

- Acceptance of the reality of loss
- Experience the pain of grief
- Adjustment to the environment without the deceased
- Withdrawal of emotional energy and reinvesting in other relationships

Worden, (1982)

Experiential Model

- Getting the news
- Finding out
- Facing realities
- Becoming engulfed with suffering
- Emerging from the suffering
- Getting on with life
- Experiencing personal growth

Hogan, (1996)

Transitions in Dying and Bereavement

- **Walking the edges: when a death occurs**
- **Entering the depths: adjusting to loss**
- **Reconnecting with the world: mending the heart**

Cairns et al. (2003)

WALKING THE EDGES

SOCIAL

- Autopilot
- Withdrawal or fear of being alone
- Unrealistic expectations
- Poor judgment

PHYSICAL

- Shortness of breath, palpitations
- Digestive upsets
- Shock
- Low energy, weakness, restlessness

WALKING THE EDGES

EMOTIONAL

- Crying, sobbing, wailing
- Indifference, emptiness
- Helplessness, outrage

COGNITIVE

- Confusion, forgetfulness, poor concentration
- Daydreaming, denial
- Constant thoughts about person who died or death itself

WALKING THE EDGES

SPIRITUAL

- Blaming God or “life”
- Lack of meaning, direction, or hope
- Wishing to join the person who died

Adjusting to loss

Social

Continued withdrawal
and isolation;
Wanting company but
unable to ask;
Rushing into new
relationships;
Self-consciousness

Physical

Tight chest, sharp
pangs, shortness of
breath;
Digestive upsets;
Aimless activity,
gnawing emptiness;
Changes in appetite or
sleep patterns

Adjusting to loss

Emotional

intense and conflicting emotions;

Anger, sadness, guilt, hopelessness;

Generalized anxiety;

Magnified fears for self, others

Cognitive

Sense of going crazy;

Memory problems;

Understanding and concentration poor;

Vivid dreams and nightmares

Adjusting to loss

Spiritual

Sensing the presence of the person who died; visitations;

Continued lack of meaning or purpose;

Attempts to contact the person who died

MENDING THE HEART

SOCIAL

- More interest in daily affairs of others
- Ability to reach out and meet others
- Energy for social relationships
- Desire for independence resurfaces

PHYSICAL

- Symptoms subside
- Sleep pattern and appetite return to normal
- Gut-wrenching emptiness lightens

MENDING THE HEART

EMOTIONAL

- Emotions less intense
- Feeling of coming out of a fog
- More peace and happiness
- Some guilt about how life goes on

COGNITIVE

- Perspective about death increases
- Remember with less pain
- Memory, concentration improve
- Dreams/nightmares decrease

MENDING THE HEART

SPIRITUAL

- Connection with religious and/or spiritual beliefs
- Life has new meaning/purpose
- Acceptance that death is part of life

DISENFRACTHISED GRIEF

GRIEF THAT PERSONS EXPERIENCE
WHEN THEY INCUR A LOSS THAT IS
NOT OR CANNOT BE OPENLY
ACKNOWLEDGED, PUBLICLY
MOURNED, OR SOCIALLY SUPPORTED

DISENFRACTHISED GRIEF

- RELATIONSHIP NOT RECOGNIZED
- LOSS NOT RECOGNIZED
- GRIEVER NOT RECOGNIZED

DISENFRACTHISED GRIEF : IMPACT

- GRIEF INTENSIFIED
- AMBIVALENT
RELATIONSHIP/CONCURRENT
CRISIS=COMPLICATED GRIEF
- LACKING NORMAL SUPPORT

COMPLICATED GRIEF

- Preoccupation with yearning for, and searching for the deceased
- Intrusive images, ideas, recurrent dreams/nightmares
- Active avoidance of thoughts, communication, or action associated with the loss
- Interference with daily functioning
- Persistent symptoms

Ogrodniczuk (2003)

Risk Factors

- History of difficult relationship
- Challenging circumstances of the death
- Intensity of grief reactions, both in anticipatory grief and bereavement
- Poor quality of support network as perceived by bereaved person
- History of unresolved losses (e.g. grief, abuse, abandonment)

Risk Factors (cont'd)

- Concurrent stresses (e.g. job or relationship difficulties, other caregiving roles, financial distress)
- Multiple losses
- History of drug or alcohol use
- History of illness, mental health issues, developmental problems

Cairns, Johnson, & Wainwright, (1993)

Grief and Depression

- Range & variability of moods and feelings
- Capable of internal and external expression
- Guilt assoc. with loss
- Wants solitude but responds to warmth
- Sporadic pleasure, retain sense of humor
- Moods and feelings are low, more static
- Absence of externally directed anger, internally directed
- Loss confirms they are bad or worthless
- Fear being alone or are unresponsive to others
- No pleasure, sense of humor

Fleming, (1986)

CHILDREN'S GRIEF

- Children know and understand much more than we give them credit for
- One of the biggest impediments to children's healing after death is...adults
- Grieving children don't need to be fixed
- Don't need to be "taught" as much as "allowed"..make their own meaning
- Children are resilient, but not in a vacuum
- "learn your theories well but lay them aside when you touch the reality of the living soul"

CHILDREN'S GRIEF (CONT'D)

- Labels work well for cans and bottles, but aren't so good for kids
- Forms of expression vary, what matters most is feeling understood
- It is better off reframing emotions as messages to embrace rather than enemies to escape from
- “ give sorrow words” or “paint” or “music” or “play” or “silence”
- Children need, want, and deserve honesty, truth, and choices
- The best thing we “all” can do for kids is to listen

AT THE TIME OF DEATH: HELPING FAMILIES

- FAMILY REACTIONS
- NATURE OF DEATH
- AFTER DEATH DETAILS
- RITUALS

Common Clichés

- Exhort people to be strong:
“ the person who died wouldn’t want you to cry”
- Want people to hurry up their grief:
“ Life goes on”
- Increase guilt about how people grieve:
“ You aren’t counting your blessings”
- Suggest religion should comfort:
“God never gives you more than you can handle”
- Discount and minimize:
“ I know just how you feel”

Linn, (1986)

Working with volatile emotions

- Encourage people to honor their sadness
- Understand ambivalence, explore pain and strengths
- Identify sources of guilt; facilitate forgiveness
- Offer strategies for defusing anger
- Identify the fears

Cairns, et al., (2003)

OTHER SIDE OF EMOTION

- **SORROW:** memories bring a sense of loving and being loved
- **GUILT:** one decides what one wants to hold onto and value, the remainder is forgiven and released
- **ANGER:** energy for action; from the same source as initiative; growth requires dynamic energy

OTHER SIDE OF EMOTION

- **FEAR&ANXIETY:** responding to change and getting ready for challenge, instead of "I am afraid".."I am ready"; fear is an indicator of being at one's personal edge where growth can happen.
- **HOPELESSNESS:** recognition of the natural cycles of life can bring an acceptance of oneself and one's experience of loss and grief

Interacting with others

- **Assess strength of support system**
- **Provide information to family and friends**
- **Offer opportunities to be with other bereaved people**

Adjusting to grief

- **Facilitate pacing of activities and advocate self care**
- **Validate the grief work that people are doing**

Spiritual Questions

- Be with people in their suffering
- Assist people to create supportive practices for reflection and renewal
- Ask directly about experiences of presence or visitations

Difficult Grief: What Helps

- Opening to grief
- Accepting the reality
- Resolving the pattern
- Managing the intensity or amount of grief
- Facing the future
- Attending to self

Cairns, et al., (2003)

Self Care Strategies

- Respect what your mind, emotions, and body are telling you
- Expect to feel a multitude of emotions
- Reach out for support
- Embrace your spirituality
- Acknowledge how you are changed by this experience

Wolfelt, (2002)

HELP US TO BE THE ALWAYS HOPEFUL
GARDNERS OF THE SPIRIT WHO KNOW
THAT WITHOUT DARKNESS NOTHING
COMES TO BIRTH AS WITHOUT LIGHT
NOTHING FLOWERS

MAY SARTON (1993)

Web sites

- Grief Net: www.griefnet.org
- Growth House Search: www.growthhouse.org/search.htm
- Grief recovery: www.griefrecovery.com
- Children: www.childrensgrief.net
- Hospice Net: www.hospicenet.org/index.html
- Kid Said: <http://kidsaid.com/>
- Widow Net: www.fortnet.org/WidowNet/index.html
- Parents of Murdered Children: www.pomc.com
- Survivors of suicide: www.main.org/sos/

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