

Understanding Grief and Loss

Julia Ellifritt, LISW-S
Cornerstone of Hope
Bereavement Center



Grief

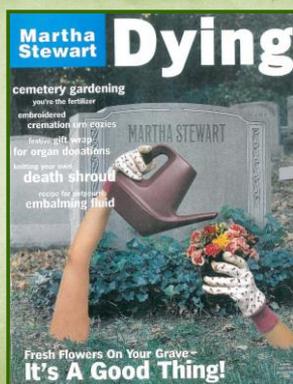
The pain now, is part of the happiness then. That's just the deal.

~ C. S. Lewis



Grief Overview

- Grief affects 100% of us
- It is not a mental health diagnosis
- It's a natural response to loss
- We treat normal
- Death is a game changer
- The use of a substance or the presence of a mental health diagnosis affects how we go through the grief process



Types of Losses

- Developmental
- Some aspect of self
- External objects
- Death of person



Grief Definition

- Sadness
 - Pit in stomach
 - Physical symptoms
 - Emotional affects
 - Spiritual affects
 - The internal response to a loss
- 

Mourning Definition

- External behavioral response
 - Funeral/burial process
 - Tied into culture
- 

Tasks of Mourning

- Accept the reality of the loss
 - Adjust to a new environment without the deceased
 - Reinvest energy into something or someone else
 - Finding the “new normal”
- 

Factors Influencing Grief Reactions

- Nature of the loss
 - Role losses
 - Coping skills
 - Past experiences with death
 - Age of mourner
 - Age of the deceased
- 

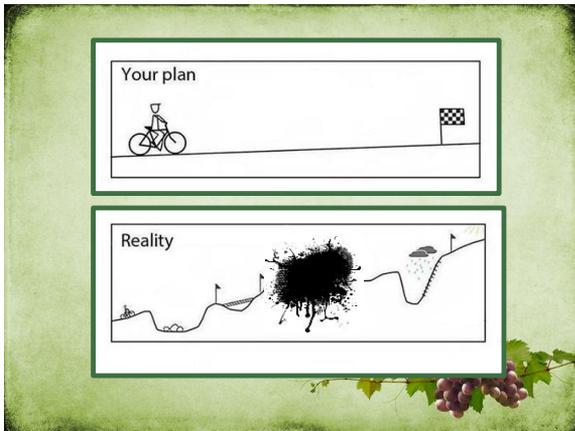
- Social, cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds
 - Unfinished business
 - Secondary losses
 - Sudden vs. expected
 - Type of death (tragic, suicide, AIDS)
 - Anticipatory grief
 - Concurrent stress
 - Support system (perceived)
 - Disenfranchised grief
- 

Goals of Grief Care

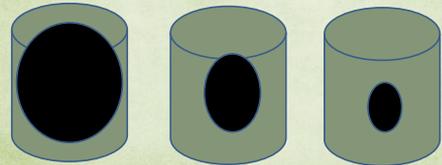
- The goal is not to ‘get over it’
 - The goal is to remember with less pain
 - The goal is to learn to live without that person
- 

Denial

- Denial and avoidance are life-saving skills
- Grief is a 24 hour/day situation, so people need to dose themselves
- Evasion from the new reality is not denial

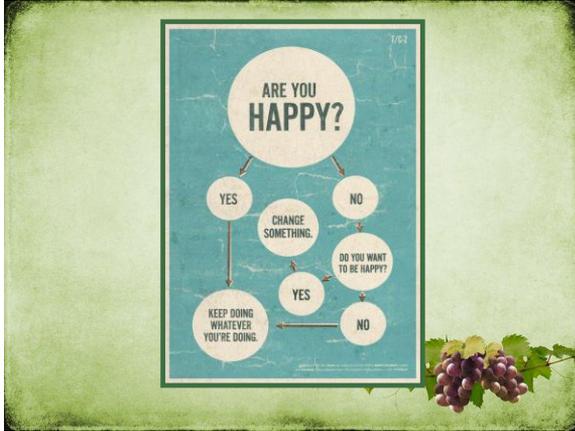


Will life always look like this?



Coping

There is no one *right* way to do grief.



The treatment the wound gets determines whether time will bring healing or hate.

~Elsa McInnes

Practical Applications

- Let them tell their story
- Ask "What is the most challenging thing for you right now?"
- Don't be a Kleenex pusher
- No clichés

- Never say "get over it"
- Never say "I know how you feel"
- The most important question to ask: "Did you expect the death to happen?"
- Evasion from the new reality is not denial

Complicated Grief

- 64 million dollar question
- Excessive or extended
- Typical grief that went bad
- There's always a reason people get stuck in their grief
- DSM 5

When Sobriety and Grief Meet

- One trend that seems to be true for most human beings is that we generally don't like to feel physical or emotional pain.
 - A trend that seems true for most substances is that they generally do a good job numbing physical and/or emotional pain.
 - Grief can be seen as an appropriate time to take advantage of their pain numbing effects.
- 

Unresolved grief and loss frequently accompany people throughout the process of moving from the culture of addiction to the culture of recovery.



- Stages of grief
 - Denial is a well known aspect of addiction
 - Relapse
 - Addiction makes addicts absent from their own lives, so their grief can seem fresh once they get sober
- 

Practical Applications

- Identify coping that doesn't come in a bottle, pill or powder
 - Create a healthy support system (isolation is common when a person stops using a substance)
 - Acknowledge the reality that you may feel emotions you haven't felt
 - Seek professional support around grief as well as recovery
 - Develop new ways to cope
 - Know your triggers and have a plan
 - Grief triggers can quickly become relapse triggers
- 

- We always treat trauma before we treat grief
 - Trauma treatment
 - A mental health issue will always impact grief, and vice versa
 - We treat a mental health diagnosis prior to treating grief
 - Sometimes they can be done simultaneously
 - Assess for suicidality
 - Create healthy support systems
- 

7 Factors that pose high risk for complicated mourning

- Sudden, unanticipated death; usually disenfranchised and involves the justice system
 - Death from an overly lengthy illness (ALS)
 - Loss of a child(ren)
 - The perception that the death was preventable
 - Relationship with the deceased that was angry, ambivalent, or dependent
 - Unresolved losses, stressors or mental health issues
 - Mourner's perceived lack of support
- 

Draw Your Grief



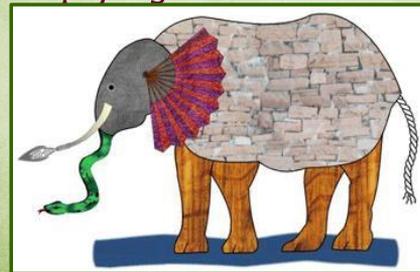
My World



Broken Pots



What part of my grief am I paying attention to?



Questions

- In what ways did love transform your life?
- How is grief transforming your life?
- Are your assumptions, values, and priorities changing since the death? How or how not?
- In what ways are you living for the person who died?
- Would you say you have grown, or are growing, as a result of your grief?
- How will you live your new life even as you honor your past life and love?

Other ideas...

- Journal starters
- Collages
- Stepping stones
- Grief selfies
- Grief apps

Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning.

~ Victor Frankl



Thank You for
Participating
Today!

