

Grief and Loss

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Geriatric Healthcare Lecture Series
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Goals

- ▶ Explore loss & grief, & examine Covid-19's effect on them.
- ▶ Consider the ways grief & loss impact "what really matters" (meaning).
- ▶ Explore dementia's effects on loss & grief on persons & carers

Grief and Loss

- ▶ Grief: a normal & painful PROCESS.
- ▶ Each person deals with losses & grief in their own way.
- ▶ There are no timelines for grief. “It takes as long as it takes.”

- ▶ Processing loss & grief is difficult.
- ▶ There are varied emotions, often influenced by culture and value systems.
- ▶ Those around persons are grieving, & feel losses as well.

- ▶ Grieving is not linear, but cyclical. Resolution may not be possible.
- ▶ Isolation and loneliness are closely involved with loss & grief.
- ▶ Events around a person & carers influence how loss & grief are experienced.

- ▶ Acknowledging and naming losses & grief are beneficial.
- ▶ Current losses may expose past losses & grief, especially “unresolved grief.”
- ▶ Not dealing with difficult losses can lead to complicated grief.

- ▶ Some losses are *big*, some *little*. Some are *obvious*; some *subtle*.
- ▶ Individual loss & grief can be worse within Covid-19 context.
- ▶ Persons with dementia feel loss & grief: often don't have words to express feelings.

- ▶ Losses are not replaceable.
- ▶ Workers feel loss & grief as well.
- ▶ Countertransference can be a concern for those in healthcare.

Person's Losses

- ▶ Loss of “normal” in their lives
- ▶ With Covid-19, lack of connection to support network
- ▶ Challenges in connections to carers, family & friends

- ▶ Lack of usual rituals to deal with loss & grief
- ▶ Different roles
- ▶ Changes in structured/ unstructured time
- ▶ Carers & individuals may process differently at disparate times.

- ▶ Loss of “home”
- ▶ Loss of sense of meaning and purpose
- ▶ Other losses that are the result of an identified one

Carers’ Losses

- ▶ Remembered shared history
- ▶ Changed hopes and dreams
- ▶ Altered sense of meaning and purpose
- ▶ Relationship/companionship

- ▶ Carers & friends may feel that a person is taking too long in the grief process.
- ▶ Carers may feel “anniversary reactions” after losses.

Grief Overload

- ▶ Adverse effects of many losses building up over time
- ▶ A sense of “too-muchness”
- ▶ A compounding of losses
- ▶ Happening to persons & carers

Anticipatory Grief

- ▶ Grieving for coming losses
- ▶ Occurs incrementally for person & carers
- ▶ Needs naming
- ▶ Puts persons in limbo

Disenfranchised Grief

- ▶ Grief that cannot be expressed
- ▶ Grief from past trauma
- ▶ Grief that others discount
- ▶ Suppressed grief arising in current situation

Examples

- ▶ Death of a child/stillborn child
- ▶ Miscarriage/abortion
- ▶ Unexpected death
- ▶ Death of a pet

- ▶ Battlefield death & having to move forward in battle
- ▶ Missing body of family or friend (murder, MIA)
- ▶ Loss of someone or situation that is a “family secret”

- ▶ Post Covid-19 this may be present with opening to “new normal.”
- ▶ Not having permission or being able to grieve at the time of loss may resurface it.
- ▶ Grief may be frozen in time.

Ambiguous Loss

- ▶ Loss where there is no closure.
- ▶ There may not be an opportunity for resolution.
- ▶ Unresolved grief prevents “moving on.”

- ▶ There can be physical presence without mental abilities.
- ▶ There is no clear resolution; people keep looking for answers.

- ▶ Grief can be “put on hold.”
- ▶ Is a roller coaster of losing/ finding over & over
- ▶ “Emotional quicksand”
- ▶ Balancing present reality in face of the future

- ▶ Uncertainties are difficult.
- ▶ Need recognition & reflection
- ▶ Requires “paradoxical” thinking;
both/and
- ▶ Unanswered questions are
discomforting.

Examples

- ▶ “Neither “wife” nor “widow” in
dementia.
- ▶ Pain in breaking up of
relationships.
- ▶ Refugees or immigrants in
transition. Trauma history.

Dementia, Loss & Grief

- ▶ People with dementia & their carers do face losses and grief.
- ▶ Don't "vanish" people with dementia from their lived experience of sadness!

Suffering

- ▶ A person's perception of suffering can affect how they deal with losses & move into their grief.
- ▶ Cultural and spiritual beliefs affect how suffering is dealt with.
- ▶ Spiritual Distress

- ▶ We can accompany people through suffering but can't take it away.
- ▶ It is difficult to watch a person suffer through a loss & resultant grief.
- ▶ Be Patient

Look at your own loss and grief issues first to see how they affect your practice.

Use HOPE Model

- ▶ **H** Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strengths, love & connection
- ▶ **O** Organized faith based group
- ▶ **P** Personal spirituality & practices
- ▶ **E** Effects on medical care or end of life

• Adapted from Christine Puchaski

Strategies for Healing

- ▶ **ACKNOWLEDGE** the loss & grief.
- ▶ As possible, give person the time **THEY** need for grief work.
- ▶ Listen. Practice compassionate presence.
- ▶ Join persons on their journey.

- ▶ Identify persons' feelings. Emphasize normalcy of anger, guilt....
- ▶ Support through pain; don't protect from pain.
- ▶ Note how how loss & grief are affecting general health.

- ▶ Understand how culture, history and values affect loss & grieving for persons.
- ▶ Accommodate needs for rituals as is possible.

Help Build Resilience

- ▶ Bouncing back from setbacks
- ▶ Returning to sense of balance
- ▶ A buffering factor in challenges
- ▶ Having future purpose
- ▶ Getting stronger in challenges

Ways to Build Resilience With People

- ▶ Help them make connections.
(virtual in Covid-19)
- ▶ Aid them to not see crises as insurmountable.
- ▶ Remind that change is a part of living.

- ▶ Assist with making goals & moving toward them.
- ▶ Remind them of what they identify as sense of meaning, what matters, purpose
- ▶ Give permission for them to do what it takes for them to work through process.

- ▶ Assist in looking for opportunities for self-discovery
- ▶ Encourage them to nurture a positive view of themselves
- ▶ Help them keep things in perspective based on what matters to them
- ▶ Maintain a realistic hopeful outlook & encourage hopefulness

Adapted from American
Psychological Association

Look to Internal Strengths

- ▶ Faith “True Grit”
- ▶ Humor “Pluck”
- ▶ Problem solving skills
- ▶ Family support

Dealing with Ambiguous Loss

- ▶ Find Meaning
- ▶ Balance Control with Acceptance
- ▶ Broaden Identity
- ▶ Manage Mixed Emotions

- ▶ Hold On AND Let Go
- ▶ Imagine New Hopes and Dreams
- ▶ Take the Time to Mind the self

Pauline Boss (2011)

Meaning/Spiritual Questions

- ▶ Ask: What is important to you right now?"
- ▶ Ask: How can I help you?

Time as an Issue

- ▶ Look for appropriate referrals to chaplains, spiritual advisors.
- ▶ See carers and supports as part of the team.
- ▶ Lead persons to support groups.

Ideas for Dealing with Loss & Grief

- ▶ Journaling
- ▶ Creative arts
- ▶ Rituals
- ▶ Self-care

Resources

Boss, P. (2011). *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief: Loving Someone Who has Dementia*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Willis, Claire B. (2013). *Lasting Words: A Guide to Finding Meaning Toward the Close of Life*. Brattleboro, VT: Green Writers Press.

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