



Exploring Bereavement

A Look at Grief & Loss

presented by

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Objectives

- Understand bereavement, grief, and mourning.
- Learn about how attachment and relationship can influence the grieving process.
- Explore traumatic grief, and the complications that can have an impact on healing.
- Learn about grieving after the death of a pet, and how post-bereavement hallucinations can play a part in the grieving journey.
- Take away strategies and some practical approaches to support those that are grieving.



Bereavement

What is bereavement?

- The period of mourning & reactions of grief after a loss, especially after a loved one dies.

What is grief?

- This is the internal emotional response to loss.

What is mourning?

- This is the external outward expression of grief.



Grief

- The grieving process is a normal response to loss and a unique experience for each person depending on their relationship and attachment to the deceased.
- It has its own timeline.
- It is as individual as a fingerprint.



Physical Signs of Grief

- Crying and sighing
- Eating patterns change
- Sleeping is disturbed
- Body aches, fatigue, illness due to weakened immune system
- Changes to blood pressure, heart rate, & blood sugar levels



Emotional Signs of Grief

- Fear, anxiety, & panic
- Sadness
- Depression
- Frustrations, anger, rage, & short fuse
- Feelings of helplessness or dependence on others
- Guilt, regret, relief & blame
- Yearning



Behavioural Signs of Grief

- Lack of motivation
- Neglecting hygiene & self-care
- Increase in substance use, such as alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, sex, gambling etc.



Cognitive Signs of Grief

- Worrying about the future
- Thoughts are all over the place
- Lack of concentration & inability to focus on task or complete tasks
- Forgetfulness
- Inability to retain information



Social Impact of Grief

- Isolating from friends & family
- Sensitive to comments & behaviour of others
- Behaving in uncharacteristic ways or unusual ways
- Working too much
- Partying too much &/or dating to numb out from loneliness



Spiritual Symptoms of Grief

- Searching for a reason for the loss
- Questioning life purpose & reason for suffering
- Questioning religious views &/or beliefs



Mourning

- Mourning is the key to healing after a loss.
- To mourn is to:
 - Fully accept reality of the loss.
 - Experience the pain of the loss.
 - Adjust to the loss.
 - Find a connection with the deceased & reinvest in relationships with the living again.



Complicated Grief

- When the grieving process is debilitating.
- When the intensity of the emotions do not soften, but get worse.
- When there is a persistent longing, or pining for the deceased.



Continued...

- When the griever is completely focused on the person who died, which makes any enjoyment in life impossible.
- When the griever cannot accept the reality of the death.



Complicating Factors

- Circumstances of the loss & the stigma attached
- Personality of the griever, stress load, & how they process emotions
- Relationship with the deceased
- Secondary losses



Continued...

- Support system
- Cultural beliefs & spiritual background
- Ceremonies or an inability to participate in them.
- Accumulation of losses.



Traumatic Grief

- When a person experiences a traumatic event & the grief journey that follows.
- Recognize the normal response to the abnormal.
- That these are symptoms of an injury that needs careful & compassionate care.
- That PTSD and Traumatic Grief are on the same continuum.



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- A grief response after a traumatic event?
- Could PTSD in relationship to a loss be reframed as Traumatic Grief to encourage & facilitate healing in the bereaved?
- PTSD is believed to be a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event.



PTSD~Symptoms

Re-experiencing the event that include:

- Flashbacks, repeated thoughts or perceptions.
- Dreams &/or hallucinations.
- Psychological or physiological reactions to cues that remind them of the event.



PTSD~Symptoms

Avoidance:

- Thoughts, feelings &/or conversations that remind them of the event.
- Activities, places, or people that remind them of the event.



PTSD~Symptoms

Negative mood or cognition:

- The inability to remember the event or significant aspects of the event.
- Persistent & exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself, others, & a change in worldview.
- Distorted views on the cause or consequences of the event.



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- Diminished interest & participation in significant activities.
- Feeling detached or estranged from friends & family.
- Persistent inability to experience positive emotions.



PTSD~Symptoms

Hyper-arousal:

- Connected to the fear & fight-or-flight responses.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Behavioural changes: reckless or destructive behaviour, irritability &/or aggression.



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- Difficulty concentrating.
- Hypervigilance.
- Exaggerated startle response to sudden noises or quick movements.



PTSD VS Grief	Shared
Thoughts or perception about loss/event	*
Images of the event	*
Dreams about the event	*
Illusions &/or hallucinations	*
Flashbacks	sometimes
Avoiding thoughts, feelings, conversations, places, activities, &/or people that are reminders	*
Persistent negative beliefs about self, others &/or world	sometimes
Distorted thoughts about the cause or consequences	sometimes
Diminished interest &/or participation in activities	*
Isolation &/or detachment from friends & family	*
Difficulties sleeping	*
Irritable, emotional outbursts, anger	*
Confusion, difficulty concentrating, disorganization	*
Hypervigilance	Sometimes
Exaggerated startle response	*



Providing Support

- Mourning can help put the power back into the hands of the griever.
- Providing education about grief & mourning helps to normalize reactions.
- Understanding & trusting the process even while painful to witness.
- Listening & witnessing without trying to fix or take away the pain.



Mourning Traumatic Grief

Fully accept reality of the loss:

- Acknowledge that the traumatic event happened.
- Understand the impact of the primary & secondary losses.
- Remember there is no timeline attached to grieving (it may take months or years to process the loss).
- Look at the cognitive (head) vs affective (heart).



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- Understand that those processing grief will oscillate between reality & distraction (this is a healthy coping strategy).
- Replay the event by talking about the event and the memories (both good & bad).
- Talking about it helps to facilitate mourning.



Mourning Traumatic Grief

Experience & Embrace the pain of the loss:

- Physical responses (physical painful)
- Cognitive responses (memories are confused)
- Emotional (waves of grief)
- Social (isolation from friends & family)
- Spiritual (question life purpose)



Continued...

- Understanding the role of pain associated with grief.
- Allowing the waves of grief to come & go.
- Learning to release control over emotions & accept them naturally.



Mourning Traumatic Grief

Remember the loss:

- Pursue a relationship with the deceased.
- Adjust to the loss by converting the relationship with the deceased from one in the present to memory.
- Allow in the love & attachment through memory gathering & sharing of stories.



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- Remember even if it is painful.
- Flashbacks & grief bombs are normal.
- Visit places & people that bring reminders to help to process what happened.
- Write letters, journal daily, and speak to the person that died.
- Embracing the past helps to find meaning in the future.



Mourning Traumatic Grief

Find a connection with the deceased and reinvest in relationships with the living again:

- Learning to put the person in a place of memory without removing them.
- Learn to include the deceased in your narrative as you move forward.
- Learning to accept life as it is now.



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- Allow a shift in attention to the living.
- Accept that the loss will forever change a person.
- Embrace the necessary evolution of the new identity, sense of purpose, and meaning to life.
- Peer based bereavement support groups are important for gaining not only knowledge, but for non-judgmental and long-term support.



Post Bereavement Hallucinations

- The experience of seeing or sensing a person after they have died is very common.
- It is thought that 60% of bereaved people will have hallucinations of the person who died.
- Those who have had a spouse die are more apt to have what is called Post-Bereavement Hallucinatory Experience (PBHE).



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- Widows have reported hearing the deceased calling their name or they will catch a glimpse of them sitting in their favourite chair.
- These hallucinations are thought to be similar to the flashbacks experienced by those that suffer with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- The hallucinations appear during the first three months.



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- Our brain unconsciously fills in the missing information to mold the world into what we have previously lived.
- This will often provide comfort at an emotionally painful and lonely time.
- Find pleasure and healing in the hallucinations that remind the griever of the love that was shared with the person who has died.



What About Pet Loss?

- Most of us share an intensely emotional individual relationship with our pets.
- Our pets provide us with day to day love & attachment.
- It is a natural response to feel sadness and experience a grief reaction that is similar to losing a person after a pet dies.



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- Those grieving a beloved pet will often experience emotional pain, and feel an absence for a time after a pet's death.
- It is important to feel the emotions, & allow yourself time to process the death.
- Think about the act of mourning & honour the pet's life by remembering the life you shared.



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- Memory books with stories of your time together can help soften the emotions.
- Host a ceremony to honour their life and share stories with family members.
- Reach out to the humane society to join a peer support group dedicated to pet loss, as being with others who are grieving is healing.



Resources

Websites:

www.whatsyourgrief.com

www.centreforloss.com

www.goodgrief.org

Books:

Reframing PTSD as Traumatic Grief by Dr. Alan Wolfelt

The Wilderness of Grief by Dr. Alan Wolfelt

Grief Counselling & Grief Therapy by William Worden

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