

Heart House Hospice

2020 Presentation to Summerville

Grief 101



Grief Defined

- Grief is everything we think and feel inside after someone we love dies or leaves, or something we are attached to goes away.
- Grief is the instinctive human response to loss.

Mourning Defined

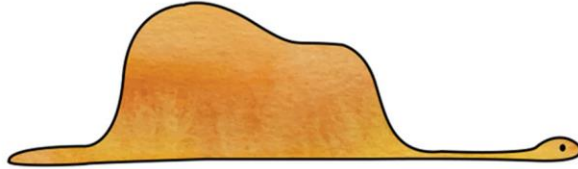
- Mourning is the outward expression of grief. The thoughts, feelings, memories that instinctively occur in bereavement are processed through mourning.
- Mourning is an active choice on the part of the grieving person. We must intentionally turn toward the grief rather than moving away from it, in order to mourn.
- It is through the normal, natural and necessary process of mourning that we heal.

The Work of Mourning

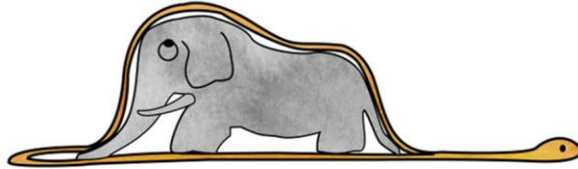
It is through active and honest mourning that we reconstruct hope and meaning in our lives, and create new purposes. Active mourning is hard emotional work that takes intention and courage.

- Sharing stories and memories of the person who died.
- Allowing emotions to be expressed verbally with at least one trusted person.
- Prayer, meditation.
- Journaling, art, music, letter-writing
- Rituals (visiting the cemetery, funeral, candle lighting, celebration of life, memorial)
- Preparing memory books, scrap books, looking a photo albums.
- Bereavement support groups, counselling

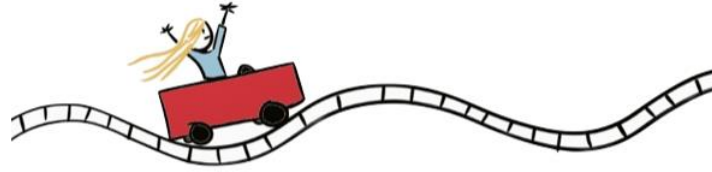
Digesting an Elephant



"My drawing was not a picture of a hat.
It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant."



The Grief Roller Coaster



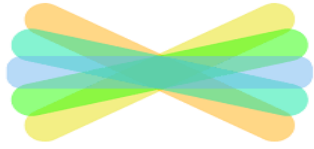
Waves of Grief



6 Needs of Mourning

---Alan Wolfelt

- Acknowledging the reality of the death
- Embracing the pain of the loss
- Remembering the person who died
- Developing a new self-identity
- Searching for / creating new meaning
- Receiving ongoing support from others



Grief – A Balancing Act

Balancing....

Bouts of pain (grief surges) and periods of respite.

Being with others and being alone.

Privacy and sharing.

Interest in the past and interest in the future.

Engaging in “grief work” and “ordinary life.”

Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

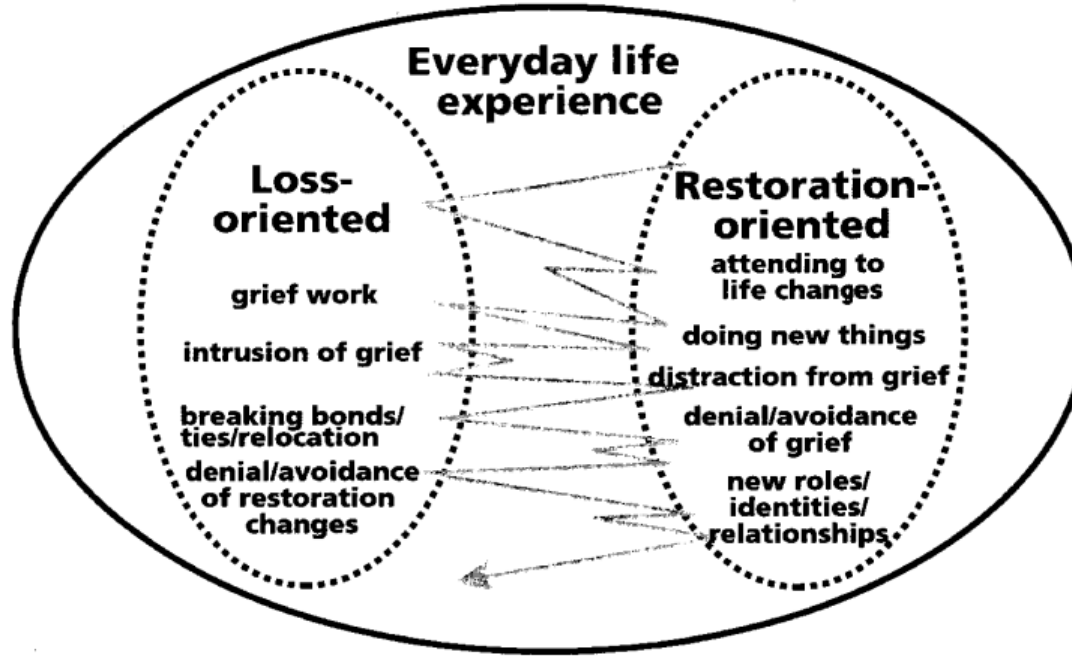


FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/dual-process-model-of-grief/>

Worden's Tasks of Mourning

Task #1



To Accept the Reality of the Loss

To Work Through the Pain of Grief

Task #2



Task #3



To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Embarking on a New Life

Task #4



The Six 'R's of Mourning

by Therese Rando, PhD



Common Elements in Grief

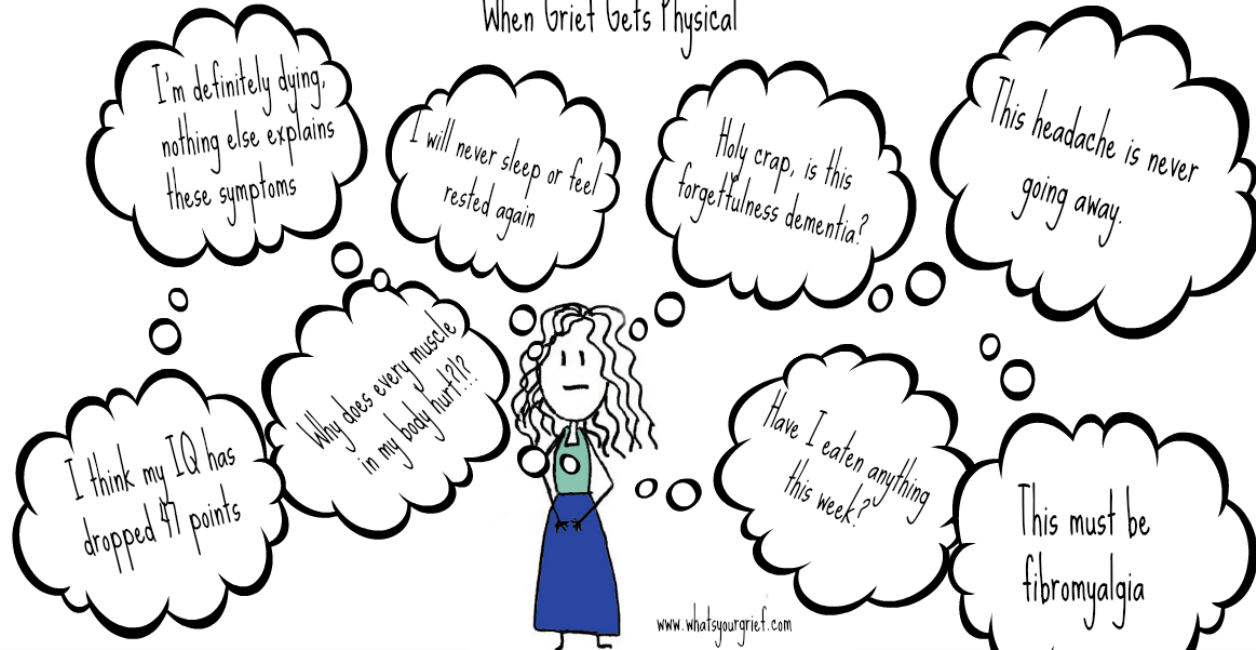
- Accepting and adjusting to loss needs time, compassion and community.
- Shock, numbness and disbelief are common immediately after loss.
- Grief touches every aspect of a person's life: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and psychological.
- A person's history and social context, resources (or lack of supports), and the way their loved one died, among other factors, will influence their grief.
- Present-day grief can trigger feelings related to earlier losses. It is never too late to mourn losses and to find greater healing and peace.

The Effects of Grief



Physical Effects of Grief

When Grief Gets Physical



Emotional Signs of Grief

- Anger/rage
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Emptiness
- Crying
- Hopelessness
- Guilt
- Yearning
- Anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts
- Isolation
- Numbness
- Disbelief
- Irritability
- Shame
- Regret
- Depression
- Fear
- Feeling misunderstood
- Relief
- Helplessness
- Cynicism
- Bitterness
- Vulnerability

Mental/Cognitive Effects

Can be....

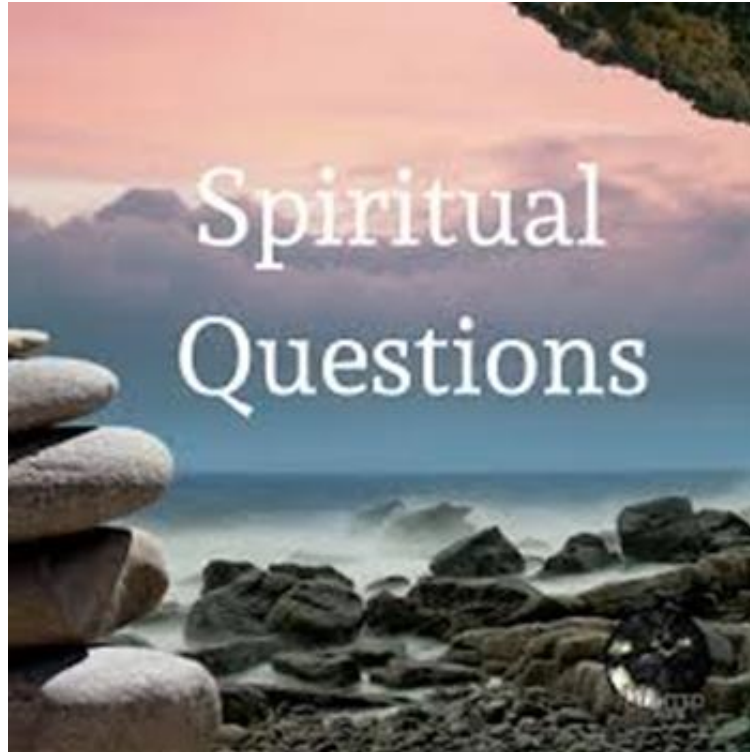
- Forgetful
- Disorganized
- Confused
- Reviewing events in one's mind
- Experiencing time distortions
- Prone to sudden mood changes triggered by thoughts
- Overwhelmed or lost
- Afraid of loss of control, uncertainty in life, vulnerability
- Hard to maintain hopeful frame of reference
- At risk of seeking unhealthy coping strategies (eg substance use.)



Social Effects



- Relationship changes within family/friend circles
- Disinterest in socializing (cocooning)
- Disinterest in activities that used to be pleasurable
- Holidays and anniversaries very difficult
- Particular places difficult to visit, activities hard to pursue
- Relationships broken
- Disconnection from community



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Search for Meaning

Death can raise many questions, for example:

- What is the reason for the death/loss?
- What is the purpose of pain and suffering?
- What is the purpose of life (and death)?
- What happens at death? After death?
- How do I live without certainty in life?
- What are my core values and beliefs now?
- How does my faith support me now? Or is my faith shaken?
- What is my relationship with God (the universe, life)? What is God's role in the loss, and in my healing?

Types of Mourners -- Ken Doka



- **Instrumental mourners:** Prefers to express grief in physical, behavioral, or even cognitive ways. Likes to focus on activities or actions as opposed to expressing feelings.
- **Intuitive mourners:** Experience a variety of powerful emotions — such as sadness, anger, and anxiety. They are more comfortable expressing these emotions with others.
- **Dissonant mourners:** When someone tries to suppress their natural way of grieving. e.g. A man might feel he needs to avoid expressing his emotions, so he tries to follow a more instrumental style of mourning. Or someone with an instrumental mourning style might struggle with why they don't feel the need to express emotions (such as crying). This lack of emotional expression then leads to feelings of anxiety.

Types of Grief



Ambiguous Grief

- Pauline **Boss** (1999) identifies two types: 1. when a person is physically present but psychologically absent (e.g. dementia) 2. when there is a physical absence but a psychological (emotional) presence (e.g. missing persons.)

Anticipatory Grief

- When a loss is expected, one begins to grieve prior to the loss. For some, it allows for a gradual preparation for the reality of the loss. It can allow for meaningful time spent with the individual leading to a sense of peace.

Complicated Grief

- In complicated grief there may be challenging factors or “unfinished business” that pre-dates the loss of our loved one. The grief reactions are long-lasting, and impair our ability to engage in daily activities. We may need the support of a trained therapist in the case of complicated grief.

Cumulative Grief

- When we experience more than one loss, without necessarily having the opportunity to grieve the first loss. Can compound our grief reactions, and make healing more challenging.

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Types of Grief

Disenfranchised Grief

- One's grief is 'disenfranchised' when the culture or support group does not recognize or invalidates the loss. The relationship to the person is not seen as significant. The loss may not be from death, but rather from a trauma, illness or injury that otherwise changes the relationship.

Traumatic Grief

- The death of a loved one involved a traumatic event that was unexpected, violent, horrifying. We may need professional grief support to move through traumatic grief.

Inhibited Grief

- A person shows no outward signs of grief for a long period of time; can lead to somatic pain or illness.

Collective Grief

- Grief felt by a collective community, organization, country.

Reconciliation vs. Resolution Integration vs. “Closure”

- Reconciliation occurs as the mourner integrates the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died.
- With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of living.
- The sharp, ever-present pain of grief gives rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose, and the peace that comes with accepting the reality of loss.



How To Support A Grieving Person

- Hear the person's story
- Normalize effects of grief, and the uniqueness of their responses
- Encourage self-compassion, self-care and coping skills
- Encourage expression of emotions, concerns, struggles
- Encourage the person to get to know his/her needs, and to build a network of supports
- Educate on the wisdom of going both toward and away from grief
- Help a person recognize how the loss has changed their identity and to make meaning of the loss
- Help a person reflect on how s/he has come to new ways of relating to their loved one
- Encourage the person as she/he re-engages life, trying new ways to offer their gifts, new ways to seek nourishment and satisfaction, a new sense of self, and new connections and pursuits.

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Resources

Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart
by Dr. Alan Wolfelt

<https://www.centerforloss.com/>

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Thanks!

Any questions?