Experiential Techniques for Grief and Loss

Healing a Broken Heart

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Workshop Structure

- Goals
- Self Care
- Schedule
- Ground Rules

Cell Phone Karma?

The Importance of Warming Up

- Ice Breakers
- Should help people
  - Enter creative, right-brain space
  - Begin to think metaphorically
  - Be personal – but not intimidating
- Opportunity to connect and observe
- NOT JUST A TIME WASTER!

Experiential Ice Breakers

1. Penny, Nickel, Dime Exercise
2. Shapes Exercise
3. Personality Exercise

Who Do You Relate To Most?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pooh</td>
<td>Winnie the Pooh would himself say he is a &quot;bear of little brain&quot;, but he still manages to have clear eyed wisdom. Despite his apparent lack of smarts, Pooh has all the time in the world for his friends and maintaining their happiness. Nothing in the world is as important to Pooh as his friends, apart from maybe craving and snacking on honey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigger</td>
<td>With a cheerful and outgoing personality, Tigger is a favorite character of many people. He enjoys friendly competition, but usually overestimates his own capabilities. Tigger is able to bounce on his tail and has great athletic abilities, but is not able to do even thing as easily (such as climbing trees). Despite this, he does have a good sense of direction. Tigger is unique as he is described as his own type of animal, being based on a tiger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>A good friend of Pooh Bear, Rabbit is a loyal and responsible rabbit. His hobbies include problem solving, and being practical. He does have a bit of a temper problem, and a slight reluctance to getting to getting too close to his friend too quickly. Once he is won over, he is a good friends who is dependable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eeyore</td>
<td>This stuffed grey donkey is known as pessimistic, melancholic and depressed. While he is often glum, Eeyore is a determined donkey who is capable of great compassion. He is a good friend of Pooh, but prefers eating thistles to honey. He also cares for plants and is able to make them grow by showing them a little bit of love.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Piglet</td>
<td>This baby pig is a very small animal who has a generally timid disposition; he shows this with his stutter when he speaks. Despite being afraid of many things, Piglet often wants to conquer his fears and seems as though he wants to be brave. He has a squeaky voice, but a heart of gold and is a very good friend. Pooh is his best friend and they are often send spending lots of time together.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Pooh | “If ever there is tomorrow when we're not together... there is something you must always remember. you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart... I'll always be with you.”  
-Winnie the Pooh |
Grief and Loss

Loss
Grief
&
Mourning

I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!

Along the Road
ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

Scriptures

- Ecc 3:1-8: To every thing there is a season...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance
- Matt 5:4: Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted
- Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep

Bereavement

An objective state or condition of deprivation which is followed or accompanied by the process of grief

What Have You Lost?

- The greatest loss may not be obvious to others
- The griever may not be aware of the secondary losses
- Recognizing the secondary losses takes time

Loss Inventory

Divorce Loss Example
- Friends
- Lifestyle
- Daily child contact
- Household chores
- Babysitter
- Accountant
- Sexual partner
- Inlaw family

- Ministry
- Freedom
- Neighborhood
- Shared holidays
- Parental partner
- Event organizer
- Shopper
Individually take two minutes to write your definition of grief.

Defining Grief

Grief

- Intense emotional suffering
- Acute sorrow deep sadness
- Cause of suffering

Rando (1993) defines grief as:

“The process of experiencing the psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions to the perception of loss.”

Clinical Implications of Grief

1. Grief is experienced all facets of a person’s life
2. Grief is a continuing development. It is not static and changes with time
3. Grief is a natural, expectable reaction to all types of loss not just death.
4. Grief is greatly dependent upon one’s perception of the loss. (Rando, 1993)

Grief experienced

Grief is experienced in four major ways:
- **Psychologically** (Affects, cognitions, perceptions, attitudes, and philosophy/spirituality)
- **Behaviorally** (Personal action, conduct, or demeanor)
- **Socially** (Reactions to and interactions with others)
- **Physically** (Bodily symptoms & physical health)

Mourning

A social state or condition of experiencing & expressing the grief because of the loss or bereavement.
Mourn

- Actions or feelings of one who mourns
- Expression of grief at loss and death
  - Sound, actions, appearance, clothing, drapery, displayed as sign of grief for the dead
- Period of which one mourns the dead
- Conscious & unconscious processes and behaviors

Grief Work

- Lindemann in a landmark study on grief (1944) describes the impact of "grief work."
The process involved in the completion of tasks necessary for the resolution of grief and the formation of a revised world with new relationships.

Mourning

There are different processes going on in mourning:
1. Undoing the psychosocial ties binding the mourner to the loved one
2. Adaptation to the loss (internal focus)
3. Adaptation to new world (external focus)

Inter-related Terms

- Can you be bereaved and not have grief and mourning?
- External mourning without internal grieving.
- Internal grieving without being able to externally mourn.
- Mourning encompasses much more than grief.

Why do we grieve?

C.S. Lewis (1960) in his book The Four Loves states: "There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."
How is grief like love?

Involuntary Reactions
- Young love/
  Acute Grief Reactions
- Temporary
- Experienced emotions
- From within
- Cognitive impairment
- Irrational thought processes
- Unexplained actions
- Out of control

Active Involvement
- Lasting love/
  Processes of Mourning
- Long-term
- Commitment
- Active involvement
- Thoughtful
- Intentionality
- Congruent, consistent external actions
- Personal growth

Loss

"Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love...it is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; God doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, God keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain...The dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are borne, not as a thorn in the flesh, but as a precious gift in themselves." D. Bonhoeffer

Major Types of Loss
- Material loss
- Relationship loss
- Intrapsychic loss
- Functional loss
- Role loss
- Systemic loss

You Can't Fix Grief

Reflections of a mourner

"You can't fix grief, you can only experience it day after day as you try to pick yourself up off the ground and try to rebuild a life, step by step, that was shattered into a million pieces"
### Experiential Therapy

- Traditional “talk” therapies often focus on thinking.
- Experiential Therapy allows people to see themselves in action and “play out” relational dynamics.
- Many experiential techniques get past traditional defense mechanisms.

### Effectiveness

- Empirical studies show that experiential methods help clients achieve dramatic results in areas of psychological symptom reduction.

### Many clients utilizing experiential methods report

- More sensitivity to their own needs and feelings
- A greater likelihood to express feelings and be themselves
- An improved capacity to develop meaningful and warm interpersonal relationships with others.

### Experiential Therapy

- Many clients use compulsive behaviors to avoid experience of self: experiential therapy offers opportunities to have direct experience of self in a safe and structured environment.
- Experientially, clients are able to move out of their heads and into a fuller experience at which time they can experience problems and rehearse solutions in a new way – expanding their sense of self and replacing compulsive behaviors with creativity and internal safety.

### Many clients utilizing experiential methods report

- Less intensity of perceived distress
- Fewer compulsive thoughts, impulses and actions
- Fewer feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- Fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear, and anger
- A greater orientation to the present
- A tendency to be more independent and self-supportive

### Quote from a client/patient

- “I know about denial; I know about compulsion; I know about feelings. But I still do the same kinds of things that get me in trouble.”
- That’s where actual experience – personally encountering or undergoing specific emotions and behaviors – can be helpful in breaking out of compulsion and denial.
Types of Experiential Therapy

- Psychodrama – J.L. Moreno
- Gestalt – Fritz Perls
- Virginia Satir
- EFT
- Equine Therapy
- Art Therapy
- Play Therapy

Indications

- Grief
- Depression
- Addictions
- Codependency
- Trauma
- Eating Disorders
- Marriage/Family

Contraindications

- Dissociative Disorders
- Personality Disorders (BPD)
- PTSD
- Recent crisis/trauma
- Any client who is hyper-aroused, suicidal, or psychotic

Experiential Therapy with the Grieving

- Helps griever to experience their pain in a safe environment
- Gives practical techniques to face into their pain/loss
- Can help with unresolved issues with the person who died
- Can facilitate “saying goodbye”
- Helps relocate the deceased

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Different individuals will respond differently to different techniques
- Not every exercise works for every person
- Discuss options with clients to see what appeals to them
- Take their personality and grieving style into account

I Can Help you Grieve…

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I Can Help you Grieve…
Evaluations and Assessments

1. Grief Pattern Inventory
2. Life Timeline

Patterns of Grief

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<th>Intuitive</th>
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<td>Blended</td>
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Instrumental Grief

- Focus on cognition/moderated affect; while they share common feelings with intuitive grievers, feelings are less intense
- Brief periods of cognitive dysfunction are common
- A desire to master environment; thus a majority of grief energy is focused on problem-solving and planned activities as an adaptive strategy

Instrumental Grief

- A general reluctance to talk about feelings
- Grief is more of an intellectual experience
- May initially respond by explaining the circumstance of their losses rather than to affective cues
- May experience grief physically as augmented energy and take the form of restlessness or nervousness

Instrumental Grief

- May be unaware of internal arousal
- May feel disenfranchised as others do not accept their grief pattern
- May be uncomfortable with the strong expressed emotions of others

Intuitive Grief

- Focus on affect over cognition
- Longer term cognitive impairment as there may be prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate, disorganization, and disorientation
- Are less likely than instrumental grievers to seek out potential problems and solve them
Intuitive Grief

- Feelings are intensely experienced
- Expressions such as crying and lamenting mirror inner experience
- Grief expressed is a grief experienced
- Go with the experience of grief
- Majority of grief energy is focused on feelings – less energy for cognition

Intuitive Grief

- Successful adaptive strategies facilitate the experience and expression of feeling
- Physical exhaustion and/or anxiety may result
- May feel that people do not allow for adequate expression of their grief
- May be unable or unwilling to distance themselves from feelings expressed by others

Blended Grievers

- Have elements common to both instrumental and intuitive patterns - general preference for one
- More blended grievers and intuitive
- Benefit from a variety of adaptive strategies from which to select.
- May or may not have sufficiently developed adaptive strategies in both areas.

Assessment of Mourning Needs

- Break into pairs. Review the instrumental vs intuitive characteristics and define which one you most relate with.
- Identify what you would need to do to experience your grief and mourn your loss.

Life Impact Timeline

Timeline Impact Exploration

- Narrative of the timeline
- “Tell me why you have ranked them this way”
- How has this incident/person impacted the course of your life?
- Identify the secondary losses
- Help them formulate a theology of suffering
- Assess transformative perceptions, life assumptions and behaviors
Importance of Exercise for both caregiver & helper

- Defines triggers
- Identifies barriers to care
- Identifies multiple losses
- Defines impacts of life events
- Builds resiliency and personal hardiness

Remembering-Memorializing

- Fear that others will forget
- Fear that their own memories will fade
- One of the greatest gifts you can give a griever is to share a positive memory
- Fear that the loss will be meaningless

Remembering-Memorializing

- Creating a memorial
- Collages
- Online Memorials
- Events/Organizations
- Keeping a grief journal
- Writing the story
- Publish a memory book
- Writing a letter
- Funeral rituals

On-line Memorial Sites

- Free or very inexpensive
- Can post photos and videos
- Gives you broad audience and exposure
- Others can sign a guestbook
- Not static - can change with time
- Great for people who can't attend the funeral or memorial service
- Gives others people access to photos etc
- Keeps you from having to retell the story

On-Line Memorial Example
http://carrieshealth.com
Collages

- Can use with clients for almost any issue
- Make creation a process
- Utilize music, environment to make creating the collage an experience
- Encourage creativity
- Try to make it about the process – not creating a piece of art

Steps to Creating a Collage

Step 1 – Think/Visualize
Step 2 – Gather
Step 3 – Form
Step 4 – Reflect
Step 5 – Share

Collage Example

The Arts in Experiential Therapy

- Music
- Movies
- Paintings
- Poetry
- Books

Video Clip

As you watch the next video clip, what does it say to you relating to grief?

Shadowland

VIDEO
The pain then is part of the happiness now”
"It’s a bloody awful mess and that is all there is to it”
"Just talk to him"
"I know about love mostly from books"
"I have few answers any more, only the life I’ve lived”
“You learn, My God, you learn”
The boy choose safety, the man chooses suffering

Important when
• There are unresolved pre-death issues
• In cases where death is sudden and/or unexpected and there is no time for good bye
• Anytime the griever needs to process emotional and/or relational aspects of the loss
• Facilitates the integration of the cognitive and emotional domains

Experiential Techniques
1. Empty Chair
2. Writing a letter
3. Family Sculpture

The Empty Chair
Exercise

Lament
• Loss is universal
• Lament is often a lost language in the church
• Lament begins in Genesis with Abel (Gen. 4:10)
• Expression of lament is biblical
• Lament usually precedes praise
• Lament and praise are often intertwined
• There is an appeal to experience the grief while focusing the heart and mind on God
What is Lament?

- A basic form of prayer that spontaneously expresses to God the pain and suffering that accompanies trauma, crisis, death, and grief.
- Laments of Scripture are the preeminent petitionary prayer of the Old Testament
- Lament protests the irrationality of suffering and discharges conflicting emotions through plea, petition, or complaint

What is Lament?

- The lament prayer often projects a duality of anger and love in which the lamentor dramatically appeals for intervention to change the situation.
- The lament psalms direct their appeal to God, seeking deliverance from trouble and distress.

What is Lament?

- Lament gives voice to the suffering and accompanies deep loss, regardless of the loss. Lament is not about suffering; it is the language of suffering, and underlying lament are the tears and pain

The Structure of Lament

The lament in the psalms has three distinguishable subjects:

1. God,
2. the one who laments, and
3. the enemy

General Structure of Lament

1. An opening address, which often includes a vocative, such as, "Oh Lord;"
2. The lament or complaint, which provides a description of the trouble or distress;
3. A plea or petition for God's response, often giving reasons for God to act;
4. A profession of trust, faith, or confidence in God, and;
5. A vow of praise to God or a sacrifice.

(Westermann, 1981)

Writing Exercise

EXERCISE
The Power of Writing

- Journaling
- Letter Writing
- Writing with non-dominant hand

Letter From God or Personal Psalm

Exercise

Close the Day

Instructors

- Kevin Ellers – kevin_ellers@usc.salvationarmy.org
- Jennifer Cisney – jscisney@gmail.com
- Website – www.institute4compassionatecare.com

Teaching Resource

- The First 48 Hours: Spiritual Caregivers as First Responders
- Abingdon Press
- Target audience: frontline emotional and spiritual care providers

A Ministry of Presence?

Weep with those who weep...
Rom 12:15
Expressing Through Art