When Friends Just Don’t Understand: Group Grief Counseling With Undergraduates
ACPA, 2011 [Program Number 1023]

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Presentation Outline
- Introduction
- Theoretical foundations of grief counseling
- Purpose, composition, and recruitment of grief group
- Description of group structure and content
- Grief-related visualization exercise
- Discussion

Terms
- Loss: Real or perceived sense of the disappearance of something meaningful
- Grief: the affects and cognitions associated with loss
- Mourning: the behavioral response to loss

Types of Loss
- Primary: the major loss (e.g., a death).
- Secondary: those losses related and subsequent to the primary loss (e.g., loss of companionship, financial security, identity, innocence and/or purpose)
- Stigmatized: Shame associated with losses that are culturally considered taboo such as those related to HIV/AIDS, suicide, homicide, sexual abuse, unemployment, homelessness, infidelity, and/or illegal activities.
- Cultural: Associated with relocation, migration or immigration. There is a feeling that community and place have vanished; loss of cultural, social and personal identity; and moreover, loss of predictability, expectations and hope.

Types of Grief
- Uncomplicated: progressive lessening of intensity of symptoms with remittance by 6 months, increasing acceptance of death’s reality and ramifications; and gradual integration of loss.
- Complicated/traumatic: prolonged, exacerbation of grief symptoms; denial of death’s reality; and the loss remains compartmentalized.
  - types: delayed, masked, chronic, exaggerated

Theories/Models of Grief
- Historically: Stage models (i.e., Bowlby, 1969; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1972; Sanders, 1989) viewed the grief process universally, internally, linearly, and finitely, resulting in a final stage of resolution. Highlighted grief reactions: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance
- Task Models (Worden, 1982: Overlapping tasks; Rando, 1984, 1993: 6 Rs and STUGS
- Dual-Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999): confrontation (loss-oriented) and avoidance (restoration-oriented)
- Constructivist (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & Van Dyke Stringer, 2010): narrative retelling focused on personal growth; (e.g., “coincidancing”)
**Issues Particular to College Students** (re: Dual-Process Model; lack of empathy from friends)

**Group Purpose**
- To provide a time and space for students managing the loss of a loved one to gather additional coping strategies, share with others about their losses, and connect with those who have had similar experiences
- Conceived as a mixture of psychoeducation and process/support group: advertised as workshop series vs. therapy group

**Group Recruitment & Composition**
- Open to all students, faculty and staff
- Students whose loss was known to the university were sent letters
- The group consisted of several undergraduate students and two older staff members.
- There was also racial (2 African-American students, 4 White students), sex (1 male student), religious (Christian and non-affiliated students), and SES diversity (a mixture of working- and middle-class individuals).

**Group Structure**
- 4 sessions; met once per week at Counseling Ctr.; 60-minute sessions; co-facilitated

**Session Structure**
- Resources (5-10 minutes)
- Education (10-15 minute lectures)
- Discussion/Process Time, with attention to group members’ loss experiences (15 minutes)
- Relaxation/Close—e.g., Safe Space Visualization (15-20 minutes)

**Session Content**
- Session 1: Common Reactions to Loss
  - What is Grief; How Long Will I Grieve?; Grief Myths/Facts; Healthy Ways to Mourn
- Session 2: Social Support
  - Unhelpful Responses; Helpful Responses; How to best receive support
- Session 3: Contexts of Grief: Cultural & Religious/Spiritual
  - Cultural traditions for grieving; religious/spiritual beliefs/practices for coping with loss
- Session 4: Complicated Grief/Benefits of more treatment
  - Complicated/Traumatic Grief and challenges for recovery

For presentation references, the full presentation (power point slides), group session handouts, and a list of resource materials (books, websites, CD, films), please see the digital handouts for this presentation on the ACPA website.

We welcome your questions and comments—please contact us at the email addresses provided above.

Thanks for your participation!