

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

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Presentation Outline

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

Terms

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

Types of Loss

- o Primary: the major loss (e.g., a death).
- o Secondary: those losses related and subsequent to the primary loss (e.g., loss of companionship, financial security, identity, innocence and/or purpose)

- o 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.
- o 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

- o 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.
- o 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

- o 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
- o Task Models (Worden, 1982: Overlapping tasks; Rando, 1984, 1993: 6 Rs and STUGS)
- o Dual-Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999): confrontation (loss-oriented) and avoidance (restoration-oriented)
- o Constructivist (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & Van Dyke Stringer, 2010): narrative retelling focused on personal growth; (e.g., "coinciding")

Issues Particular to College Students (re: Dual-Process Model; lack of empathy from friends)

Group Purpose

- o 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
- o Conceived as a mixture of psychoeducation and process/support group: advertised as workshop series vs. therapy group

Group Recruitment & Composition

- o Open to all students, faculty and staff
- o Students whose loss was known to the university were sent letters
- o The group consisted of several undergraduate students and two older staff members.
- o 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

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

Session Structure

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

Session Content

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

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**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!