The Impact of Grief and Loss on Mental Health

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Overview

- ❏ Types of Loss
- ❏ Stages of Grief
- ❏ Impact of loss on Mental Health
- ❏ Impact of COVID-19 Grief on Mental Health
- ❏ Grief and Loss across the lifespan
- ❏ Myths about Loss and Grieving
- ❏ Interventions and Coping Skills
- ❏ Resources
- ❏ References

Types of Loss

- Death
- Divorce/Separation
- Relocation
- Role changes
- Change to the community
- Sense of normalcy

Secondary Losses

- Loss of self and self-confidence
- Loss of security and feeling “safe”
- Loss of the familiar/past
- Loss of health
- Loss of support system
- Loss of feeling close to God/Spirituality

Stages of Grief

There is no set stage that comes before the other. Feelings come and go at different times of the year, month, day.

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Stages of Grief

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Common Responses to Loss: Emotional

- ❑ Denial
- ❑ Disbelief
- ❑ Confusion
- ❑ Shock
- ❑ Sadness
- ❑ Yearning
- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Humiliation
- ❑ Despair
- ❑ Guilt

Common Responses to Loss: Somatic

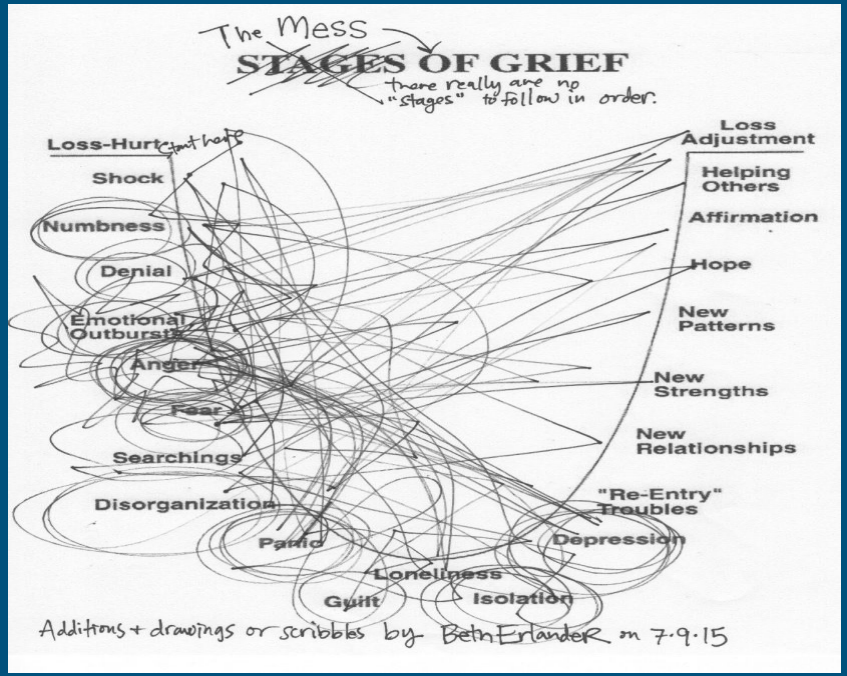
- ❑ Fatigue
- ❑ Nausea
- ❑ Lowered immunity
- ❑ Weight loss or weight gain
- ❑ Aches and pains
- ❑ Insomnia

Impact of COVID-19 Grief on Mental Health

- Many people are experiencing individual losses, including illness and death due to COVID-19, or loss of employment as a result of economic upheaval
- A time of collective sorrow: “There is a communal grief as we watch our work, health-care, education and economic systems — all of these systems we depend on — destabilize,”
- Losses include our sense of predictability, control, justice, and the belief that we can protect our children or elderly loved ones

Signs and Behaviors after a loss

- ❑ Isolation
- ❑ Sadness
- ❑ Lack of appetite
- ❑ Distraction
- ❑ Irregular Sleep
- ❑ Avoidance
- ❑ Dissociate
- ❑ Anger or Irritability



Grief and Loss in Childhood

- Early Childhood: 0-5 years old
  - The death of a loved one will be very self-focused, where the child believes that s/he is responsible for the death
  - May feel abandoned and the grief of losing a loved one may interrupt age appropriate activities
  - Emotions presented can vary greatly, from sadness, anger, anxiety, and guilt
- School-aged: 6-11 years old
  - Death of a loved one can result in a child not wanting to leave home, hoping to reassure the safety of others
  - Grief may interrupt age appropriate activities and force a child to address issues for which the child is not developmentally prepared
  - Children this age might believe that certain behavior will bring their loved ones back and might be preoccupied with fear

Grief and Loss in Adolescence

- Adolescents: 13-19 years old
  - Adolescents often deal with self-esteem and identity issues
  - If they lose a loved one, they might feel guilty because of what they might have said to the person before they died
  - Adolescents, just like the young and the school aged child who experiencing this kind of los, may experience an interruption of age-appropriate activities since this kind of loss can force an adolescent to address issues for which they are not developmentally prepared
    Adolescents often express their grief and loss issues through their body language and acting out behavior. In addition, adolescents might be internally preoccupied with death, which might be manifested through poor school performance.

Grief and Loss in Adulthood

- The young adult, 20-40 years old:
  - Young adults can be devastated by the death of a loved one, losing one's child can be paralyzing for parents.
  - Parental grief can be a long lasting and powerful experience, and is influenced by the developmental task expected by the parents. The parents might blame themselves for not protecting their child better during the disaster or crisis event.
  - Emotions might range greatly and include such things as loneliness, sadness, disbelief, anger, anxiety, etc.
  - Young adults losing a spouse or partner might feel emptiness and isolation and their social connections might change as they are no longer a couple but an individual.
  - Losing a spouse or partner at this age means not only grieving, but assuming the (often unfamiliar) responsibilities and roles of the deceased and may include helping children through grief.

- Middle-aged adult: 40-60 years old
  - Middle aged adults, similar to young adults, can be badly impacted by the sudden loss of a loved one
  - They might grieve the loss of their child(ren) and potential future grandchildren.
  - They might feel guilty for not having been able to protect their child(ren).
  - Losing a spouse or partner can leave middle aged adults with (often unfamiliar) responsibilities and roles, experiencing financial hardship, and/or dealing with grieving children.
  - Middle aged adults might grieve future plans for retiring together.

Grief and Loss in the Elderly

- The elderly adult, 60 plus years
  - Elderly adults, depending on their age, have acquired memories, cognition, material things, accomplishments, spiritual realizations, and losses.
  - They often have experienced multiple losses, such as jobs, health, independence, social roles, familiar living surroundings, and loved ones.
  - Although loss is often expected during this age, unexpected losses of child(ren) and/or spouses or partners can be detrimental, since children are often also caregivers.
  - Loss of a spouse or partner might result in feeling more dependent on others.
  - Often the elderly adult lacks the social support needed, which can be detrimental during this time.

Myths about Loss and Grieving

- **Myth: The pain will go away faster if you ignore it**
- **Fact**: Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing, it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.
- **Myth: It's important to "be strong" in the face of loss.**
- **Fact**: Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

Myths about Loss and Grieving

- **Myth: If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.**
- Fact: Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

- **Myth: Moving on with your life means forgetting about your loss.**
- Fact: Moving on means you've accepted your loss—but that's not the same as forgetting. You can move on with your life and keep the memory of someone or something you lost as an important part of you. In fact, as we move through life, these memories can become more and more integral to defining the people we are.

Interventions and Coping Skills

- ❑ Seek out caring people.
- ❑ Express your feelings.
- ❑ Take care of your health.
- ❑ Accept that life is for the living.
- ❑ Postpone major life changes.
- ❑ Be patient.
- ❑ Draw comfort from your faith/spiritual beliefs
- ❑ Join a support group
- ❑ Seek professional help when necessary.


HARDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL
WELLNESS CENTER
WELLNESS CENTER

Student Wellness Center Staff

Social Workers & Interns

- Case management
- Alternatives to Suspensions programs
- CSUMB Interns support MSW and Interventions Specialists

Interventions Specialists

- Individual counseling for student needing additional support

PBIS Clerks

- Support Interventions Specialists and Wellness Center Team

Community Partners

- Monterey County Behavioral Health
- Community Human Services
- Harmony at Home
  - Case management

Resources:

- ❏ Services | Papillon Center for Loss & Transition | United States
  - Services for youth and for adults
  - Individual and Group support
- ❏ Montage Health: Grief Support | Monterey, CA
  - Crisis Line: 24-hour crisis line – (877) 663-5433 (ONE-LIFE)
- ❏ Monterey County Behavioral Health Department
  - 1441 Constitution Blvd Suite 202 Salinas CA, 93906
  - Call (831) 796-1700
- ❏ SAMHSA
- ❏ American Counseling Association
- ❏ Suicide Prevention Lifeline OR Call 1-800-273-8255

References

- CDC Center for Disease Control and Prevention https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/grief-loss/index.html >
- American Counseling Association: Grief Reactions over the lifespan https://www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-12---grief-reactions-over-the-life-span.pdf?sfvrsn=215e928c_2
- Mental Health America: Bereavement and Grief https://www.mhanational.org/bereavement-and-grief
- Help Guide: Coping with Grief and Loss https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm

Questions?

Thank You!