

Working through grief and loss

Directorate:
Counselling and
Career
Development
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Define tomorrow.

UNISA



Objectives

- Introduce the concepts of loss and grief
- How to identify the effects of loss and grief
- How to identify and manage your own grief
- Signs and symptoms of a child's grief
- Introduce the concept of complicated grief
- Support and resources to become “grief-wise”

What is grief and loss?

- Grief is the experience of loss
- Loss can be quick and unexpected or long-term and expected
- Various contexts of loss (accident, suicide, divorce, illness, retrenchment, natural cause, trauma or disaster, loss of income)
- You never know how your life will be and it will never be same. You need to allow the process to lead you as you heal
- Grief is not linear, there is no one fits all image of what it will look or feel like
- There is no time limit or end date

How grief and loss may affect me

- Stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance
- There is no sequence, one may fluctuate between the various stages of grief
- The impact of loss may include emotional (anger, sad, lost); physiological (body aches and pains, feeling breathless); mental (feeling like something is wrong with you, that you are not okay and you do not fit into the world); religious beliefs shaken, numb and in shock, helpless and hopeless
- As a University student: loss of interest in studies, decline in academic performance, mental and health problems, withdrawal in relationships

How grief and loss may affect you

- Losing someone during the pandemic (COVID-19) may mean that you had to adhere to certain rules; you might not have said good-bye; the experience of loss may seem surreal
- Redefining who you are takes and an enormous amount of mental energy
- Be patient with yourself and do not pressurise yourself to move at any particular pace.
- Be kind to yourself

It is healthy to express grief

“When we are able to let go, we can become alive again with possibilities”

- Grief is a response to a broken bond of belonging
- Grief is the reaction to be torn from what you love
- Grief is an expression, an acknowledgement of what we value

A culture unskilled in grief?

- What are our cultural beliefs about grief? How do these affect the grieving process?
- Do we hold grief at a distance because it is the “enemy of cheerfulness”?
- Is there unspoken shame associated with grief?
- Is grief only “allowed” when death has occurred?
- Do we fear falling apart in a world that values “holding it together”?

“Make yourself available for re-growth”

How can I process my grief

- You will face many challenges as you process grief. Your circle of support may change, in fact your entire world may change. As you formulate a new sense of identify the following may assist you to manage your experience more effectively:
 - Talk to someone: tell your story
 - Practice religious/spiritual beliefs
 - Letter writing
 - Journal
 - Scrap book
 - Creative artwork

How can I process my grief

- Write a song/poem
- Exercise/ Walking with intention
- Rituals (create a new ritual)
- Ceremonies (you could honor your loved one with a memorial gathering)
- Traditions (begin a new tradition)
- Plant a tree in honor of the loved one/create a garden space

When do I need support?

Home environment	Work/study environment
Feel like you cannot move on with life/hopeless	You failed a module/s
Feeling more than sad but rather depressed	Cannot focus on tasks (higher rate of errors)
Thoughts that life is not worth living/self-harm	Often crying at work/irritable/impatient/angry
Unable to stop blaming yourself	Find it challenging to get through the day
Disturbed eating/sleeping patterns	Cannot meet deadlines (assignments)/overwhelmed
Inability to cope with daily tasks/lack self-care	Unable to focus in meetings/forgetful/daydream
Find it hard to take care of others (partner/children/siblings)	Addictive behaviours interfere with usual functioning
<p>As a student: find out whether your campus has free counselling services available. Work: contact HR and find out whether there are any resources available to support you Additional resources are available towards the end of this presentation</p>	

Negotiate support

- Your world has turned upside down and people may not know what to say or how to support you. Ask for support.
- Your circle of support may change: Reflect on who you can depend on during this challenging time of your life.
- How can you ask for support? What type of support do you need?
- How can you plan to manage your studies while processing grief, especially, as you head towards the examination period?

*"When grief is allowed, is expressed, we can let go of that
which we hold on to"*

How do children process loss?

- Child bereavement: child experiences the loss of a loved one
- The way children grieve will depend on: age, gender, personality and past experience of loss
- Young children may already have a concept of dying and death (they watch cartoons)
- You cannot protect children from the experience of loss and grief but you can assist them to cope successfully
- Developmentally children may be at various levels of understanding and processing grief.
- Funeral: closure vs trauma
- Role model positive grieving
- Talk to them about your feelings by attaching feeling words for example, “I cry because I am sad”; “Sometimes I still miss (the loved one who has passed)”

How to support a grieving child

- Stick to the routine
- Read story books with them about grief
- Allow them to express their feelings
- Offer physical comfort or a favourite toy
- Make a memory box
- Talk
- Make a photo album and journal
- Link objects and special things
- Make time to sit down and listen
- Create rituals
- Make photos available

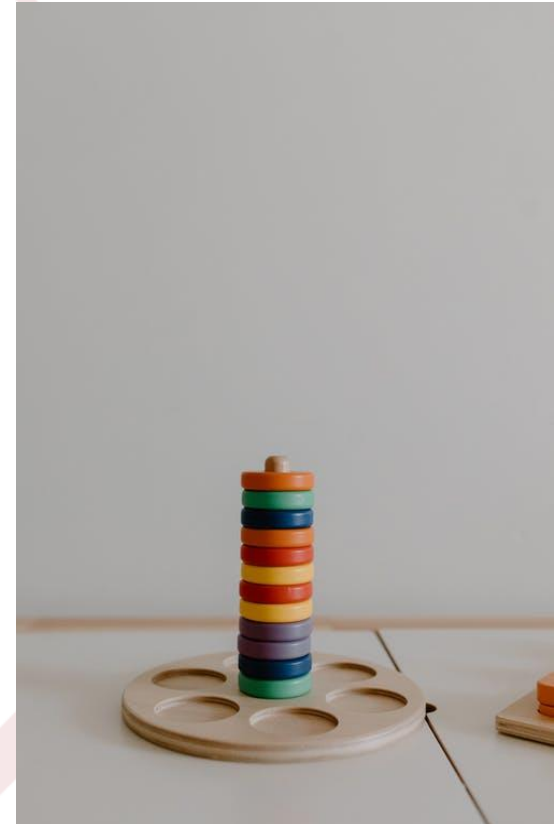


Seeking further support

You must be concerned when you notice the following in your child:

- Imitating the dead person
- Disruptive behavior recurs
- Frequent bad dreams/nightmares
- Decline in school performance
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Increased irritability
- Expressing a desire to be with the dead person

You may also notice that you are unable to manage your own grief alongside your child



How to identify complicated grief

- Most people experience loss and are able to process the grief and come to accept what has happened and move on with their lives.
- For others the loss and grief can be debilitating and the individual is unable to accept and come to terms with what has happened.
- Heightened state of mourning that prevents healing

How to identify complicated grief

Risk factors:

- More than one death within a short time period
- Nature of the death: unexpected/traumatic
- Witnessing the death (walking alongside the person if it is a long-term illness)
- Pre-existing conditions (depression / PTSD worsen)

How to identify complicated grief

Symptoms:

- Isolate yourself from others (avoid social interactions)
- Unable to participate in usual activities
- Emotional pain (deep sadness, sorrow, anger, denial, disbelief, loneliness)
- Obsession with the person that died
- Sleeping problems
- Persistent anger

How to support someone who is grieving

- If you cannot think of something to say just offer a hug, squeeze of the hand, eye contact or rub on the shoulder
- Ask how the person needs support (be specific: fill the car with petrol, cook a meal, do their laundry, pick up their child from school)
- Grief is a long process, so check in with the person months later
- Acknowledge how unbearable things are right now
- Offer to cook a meal and share this meal with the grieving individual

How to support someone who is grieving

Things to not say/do:

- This is part of God's plan/ the person that dies is in a better place
- Do not say that you understand (even if you have experienced death your experience is different from everyone else)
- Do not start talking about your own experience of death
- It is over now, move on
- Do not be directive, rather ask how they are and listen attentively to their response
- Do not post pics of the dead person, do not tag people in the funeral procession or pics of the grave without permission of the loved one

Support groups

- Grief Share: <https://www.griefshare.org/>
- The widows club: <https://www.facebook.com/Widows-Club-South-Africa-102288199820921/>
- Compassionate friends:
<http://www.compassionatefriends.co.za/>
- Facebook link to Compassionate Friends
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/261700337645037/>
- Patch SA <https://patchsa.org/bereavement-support/>

Resources

- South African Depression and Anxiety Group
https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2841:helping-to-heal-a-child-s-broken-heart&catid=68&Itemid=132
- How to deal with grief and loss https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=365:coping-with-loss-battling-bereavement-and-depression&catid=68&Itemid=132
- Life after death https://www.sadag.org/images/pdf/life_after_death.pdf
- "Recovery and Normal Reactions To Sudden Loss, Injury, and Catastrophe"; Copyright ©1970, 1999, 2001, 2006, updated 2007, 2009, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.,
- Kids' Health <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/bereavement-reactions-children-young-people-age-group>
- <https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/grief-and-loss/helping-grieving-children-and-teenagers>
- Unisa COVID-19 resources and messages [https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Announcements/Coronavirus-\(COVID%E2%80%9319\)-update](https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Announcements/Coronavirus-(COVID%E2%80%9319)-update)
- Emergency Hotline: 0800 029 999
- WhatsApp Support Line: 0600 123 456
- COVID-19 Corona Virus South African Resource Portal: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>

Resources

Framing grief and loss:

- <https://towerofgrace.org/healthy-faith-seminar-4-community-of-grieving/>
- <https://towerofgrace.org/healthy-faith-seminar-3-grieving/>

Letter writing:

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/fixing-families/201206/getting-closure-3-letters>

Journaling:

- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/writing-to-ease-grief>
- <https://www.recover-from-grief.com/grief-journaling.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB96TFiMrbg>

Scrap booking:

- <https://www.scrapbook.com/articles/after-loss>

Children's books on grief:

- *Someone I love died* by Christine Harder Tangvald
- *In my heart: a book of feelings* by Jo Witek
- *Children and grieving* by Janet Goodall

References

- Images from <https://www.pexels.com/search/young%20child/>
- <https://took-pa.com/2019/07/24/grief-is-healing-in-motion/>
- <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-deal-grief/>
- <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/bereavement-reactions-children-young-people-age-group>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/symptoms-causes/syc-20360374>
- <https://www.bridgestorecovery.com/complicated-grief/signs-complicated-grief-disorder/>
- <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/helping-someone-who-is-grieving.htm#:~:text=If%20you%20can't%20think,a%20shoulder%20to%20cry%20on>

Contacts

- Send an e-mail to counselling@unisa.ac.za should you need to discuss any needs you may have in terms of further support.
- Book an online appointment with a Unisa counsellor. See further details here: <https://bit.ly/DCCDOnline>

Thank you

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