

Small Losses. Big Losses: Coping with Grief



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District 8 Developed by Marcia Wallace
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Small Losses – Big Losses: Coping with Grief

Goals and Objectives

Goal– To provide helpful information for dealing with grief in healthy ways.

Objectives

- Define different kinds of loss
- Recognize stages of grief
- Identify healthy ways of dealing with grief
- Provide ways for people to deal with the grieving process
- Provide ways people can help others deal with grief
- Provide additional sources of help and support

Time: 30 minutes

Lesson Materials:

- Small Losses – Big Losses PowerPoint
- Small Losses – Big Losses Evaluation
- Myth or Fact Icebreaker Activity Sheet (2 per page) and Answer Sheet

Participant Materials:

- Small Losses – Big Losses Evaluation
- Myth or Fact Icebreaker Activity Sheet and Answer Sheet

Presenter Preparation Instructions

1. Obtain laptop and projector.
2. Copy Activity Sheet and Evaluation Form to distribute to participants.

**ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY
MYTH OR FACT--- ABOUT GRIEF**

1. M F If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.
2. M F Moving on with your life means you're forgetting the one you lost.
3. M F You can only grieve a death.
4. M F Women grieve more deeply than men.
5. M F There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving.
6. M F If you ignore the pain, it will go away faster.
7. M F Grief counseling is harmful.

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MYTH OR FACT - ACTIVITY ANSWERS

1. **M If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss** – Crying is a normal response to sadness. Those who don't may simply have other ways of showing their pain.
2. **M Moving on with your life means you're forgetting the one you lost.** - Accepting one's loss is not the same as forgetting. You can create a new life and still keep memories of the one you lost as part of you.
3. **M You can only grieve a death.** - The grief response to any loss, depends on the significance of what was lost in that individual's life.
4. **M Women grieve more deeply than men.** - Women generally express grief by talking about it and seeking support. Men generally express grief by problem- solving and taking on new roles and responsibilities. Both experience grief and need reassurance.
5. **F There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving.** - Fact
6. **M If you ignore the pain, it will go away faster** - Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing, grief has to be faced and actively dealt with.
7. **M Grief counseling is harmful** – Grief counseling may not be necessary for most people. if you feel the need for additional guidance and support, it can be very helpful.

Small Losses – Big Losses *Coping with Grief*

Developed by Marcia Wallace
TEEA Education Chair, District 8
August 2020

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AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Objectives

- Define different kinds of loss
- Recognize stages of grief
- Identify healthy ways of dealing with grief
- Provide ways to help yourself with the grieving process
- Learn where to find support while dealing with grief
- Learn how to help someone dealing with grief

Loss and grief are a part of life. Living through these times can be difficult and painful. Sometimes we need help getting through these times. This program will provide helpful information for dealing with grief in healthy ways. These are the objectives of the program:

Presenter should review the objectives.

Kinds of Losses

- **Loss of a pet**
- **Loss of trust in a friendship**
- **Loss of a family heirloom**
- **Retirement**
- **Moving a family for a job transfer**
- **Child leaving home**
- **Loss of approval in a peer group**

We can think about losses as 'small' or 'big.'

Small losses may change a familiar pattern of behavior while big losses mean an end to a familiar pattern of life.

While not all loss is equal, all loss is experienced 100% by those impacted. And thinking about losses as small or big is not meant to minimize the impact they have on people experiencing them.

Small Losses

- Loss of a pet
- Loss of trust in a friendship
- Loss of a family heirloom
- Retirement
- Moving a family for a job transfer
- Child leaving home
- Loss of approval in a peer group

Some examples of small losses include:

Big Losses

- Loss of a job
- Death of a loved one
- Divorce
- Loss of health and financial stability
- Loss of independent living and mobility
- Serious illness of loved one
- Loss of personal safety after a trauma
- Loss/damage of home due to a disaster

Examples of 'big' losses include:

It is important to remember that what may be a small loss for some may be a big loss for others depending on what else is going on in their lives.

Grief

Conflicting feelings caused by the end of/or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.

Grief is defined as conflicting feelings caused by the end of / or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.

Small losses and big losses elicit grief. The significance of grief- provoking circumstances differs from person to person. No two people grieve identically, even about a similar loss.

But it is important for people to grieve when they experience a loss that impacts their life.

The better your understanding of grief, the better equipped you'll be to deal with grief and help someone else who's grieving.

The first thing to understand is that grief may include many emotional, mental and physical symptoms.

Physical Symptoms

- **Tightness and lightness in the throat and chest**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Dizziness**
- **Rapid heart rate**
- **Fatigue or excessive activity**
- **Headaches**
- **Nausea and upset stomach**
- **Weight loss or weight gain**
- **Difficulty sleeping or sleeping all the time**
- **Hyperventilation**

Physical symptoms include: *(Presenter reviews content on slide)*

Grief has powerful effects on the body. Grief causes stress. Stress links the emotional and physical aspects of grief. The systems in the body that process physical and emotional stress overlap. Emotional stress can worsen health problems you already have and cause new ones. The stress of grief batters the immune system, leaving you depleted and vulnerable to physical abnormalities, i.e., increased blood pressure and frequent colds and viruses.

Mental Symptoms

- **Forgetfulness**
- **Inability to concentrate**
- **Confusion**
- **Misplacing or losing things**
- **Denial**
- **Preoccupation with the loss**
- **Reliving events of the past**
- **Inability to initiate and organize a pattern of activities**

Mental symptoms include (*Presenter reviews content on slide*):

Experiencing gaps in memory is not an unusual occurrence during the grieving process. In an attempt to cope with loss, the mind tries to protect itself by limiting the “input” of painful thoughts. In the case of a death, there may be an effort to see the loved one in every life situation, even though you know the loved one has died. Odd or frightening dreams are not uncommon. These usually become less consuming and intense with the passage of time.

Emotional Symptoms

- **Mood changes**
- **Angry outbursts with insensitive remarks**
- **Guilt or blame**
- **Fear and anxiety**
- **Numbness**
- **Intense sadness**
- **Loneliness**
- **Regrets**
- **Irritability**
- **Depression**
- **Crying spells**

Emotional symptoms include (*Presenter review content on slide*)

The emotional aspect of grief encompasses feelings of sadness, tears, yearning, and negative thoughts. These feelings are OK and normal for anyone during the grieving process. Importantly, learning to cope with grief and coming to terms with it emotionally, will alleviate many of these symptoms.

Stages of Grief

- **Shock and numbness**
- **Yearning and searching**
- **Despair and disorganization**
- **Reorganization and recovery**

It is broadly recognized that people deal with grief in stages. One model of the stages of grief of four stages of grief was formulated by psychologist, John Bowlby and was based on attachment to important persons in our lives and circumstances that shape our sense of safety, security, and connection.

The four stages are:

1. **Shock and numbness** – Loss in this phase feels impossible to accept . We are overwhelmed when trying to cope with our emotions. There may be physical distress experienced in this phase.
2. **Yearning and searching** – As we process loss in this phase, we may begin to look for comfort to fill the void left by our loss. We may become very preoccupied with what we have lost. Some guilt may occur in this phase.
3. **Despair and disorganization** – We may find ourselves questioning and feeling angry in this phase. We may feel a bit aimless and find that we retreat from others as we process our pain.
4. **Reorganization and recovery** – As we move into this phase, our life feels more hopeful. We may feel like our hearts and minds can be restored. This phase does not mean we will not feel sadness. However, this phase offers us place of healing and reconnecting with important people in our lives for support. We find small ways to

re-establish a sense of normalcy in our lives on a daily basis.

People may not go through each of these phases in order. The lines are often blurred – we move from one phase to another and possibly back again, before fully moving into a new phase.

There is no time period suggested for any of these phases. Someone may experience the phases quickly, in weeks, where another person may take months or years to come to a place of acceptance. Whatever time it takes for you to move through these phases is perfectly normal. Your pain is unique to you.

There is no “Right” way to grieve. Give yourself time to experience your loss in your own way. At the same time, remember to take care of yourself.

Helping Yourself Cope with Grief

- **Feel your loss**
- **Attend to physical needs**
- **Maintain a routine**
- **Avoid making major decisions**
- **Ask for help if you need it**
- **Volunteer with others**

When you are dealing with loss and grief, there are steps to take and things to do that will help you help yourself.

Allow yourself to cry, to feel numb, to be angry, or to feel however you are feeling. It hurts but it is natural and normal.

Express your feelings- Talk about how you are feeling with others. Find a creative way to let your feelings out. This could include art, music, or writing in a journal.

Get enough rest, eat a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly. Focusing on your physical health, often balances out your emotional wellbeing.

Avoid drinking alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant that can affect your mood so it could make you feel even more sad.

Give yourself a break from grieving by participating in activities you enjoy. It is OK to not feel sad all the time. It is good for you to laugh.

Get back into your normal routine as soon as you can. Try to keep up with your daily tasks so you don't get overwhelmed.

It takes time to adjust to a loss and get back to a normal state of mind. Making an impulsive

decision as you are grieving could add more stress at an already difficult time. Try to wait some time (this differs from one person to the next), before asking a big change, like moving or changing jobs.

You do not have to struggle. Seek out friends, family clergy, a counselor, a therapist or support groups.

You might get comfort and advice from those who understand your unique thoughts and feelings. If your symptoms are not getting better or you feel like you need extra help, talk to your family doctor.

Helping others, giving back, often helps you.

Helping Someone Else Who is Grieving

- **Listen**
- **Offer practical assistance**
- **Provide ongoing support**
- **Know what to say**

It can be painful to watch someone we care about deal with a loss. We want to help to ease their pain. We can:

Listen -

While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let them know that you're there to listen if they want to talk about their loss.

You can acknowledge the situation, express your concern, even let the grieving person talk about how their loved one died if they seem to want to do so. Sometimes, retelling the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain may lessen.

Ask how they feel. Emotions of grief can change rapidly, so don't assume you know how the person feels at any given time.

Accept their feelings, (without judgment, argument or criticism), be genuine in your communication, (don't minimize their loss), and be willing to sit in silence, (don't press if they don't feel like talking).

Offer help in practical ways –

Shop for groceries or run errands

Take care of household chores
Drive them where they need to go
Look after their pets
Take them for lunch
Share an enjoyable activity

Provide ongoing support –

After the initial shock of loss, grieving often lasts much longer than most people expect. Continue your support over the long haul. The pain may lessen in intensity over time, but sadness may never completely go away.

Offer extra support on special days. Let the grieving person know you're there on those milestone days when it may be particularly difficult for them. Holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries which often reawaken grief.

Helping Someone Else Who is Grieving

AVOID SAYING	INSTEAD SAY
How are you doing?	I don't know what to say, but I can listen.
I know how you feel.	I'm sorry you are hurting.
What can I do?	I'll bring dinner this evening.
Stop crying, you're only making it worse.	I'm sorry you are going through this.

Don't let the fear of saying something wrong stop you from reaching out. Here are some tips on what to say .. And what to avoid saying.

AVOID SAYING

“How are you doing?”

People will most likely say “fine “or “OK” rather than really communicate their feelings.

SAY INSTEAD

“I don't know what to say, but I can listen”.

This does not minimize their loss. It just shows your genuine concern.

AVOID SAYING

“I know how you feel”.

You are never truly able to know how someone else experiences loss and claiming that you do can feel invalidating.

SAY INSTEAD

“I'm sorry you are hurting”.

This puts the focus on the person who is experiencing the pain at that moment.

AVOID SAYING

“What can I do?”

This creates additional work for the grieving person. It requires mental energy to decide and assign a task. This also puts them in a position of having to ask for help.

SAY INSTEAD

“I'll bring dinner for your family this evening.”

Just do, don't wait to be asked.

AVOID SAYING

“Stop crying, you're only making it worse.”

Trying to bottle up emotions that you feel for the sake of others, will only cause resentment and prolong the grieving process.

SAY INSTEAD

“I'm sorry you are going through this. You are allowed to feel and be exactly as you are.”

Acknowledge the person's feelings. Offer acceptance and support.

Avoid statements that begin with, “You should” or “You will.”

These statements are too directive and judgmental. Instead “Have you thought about” or “You might,” are statements which offer support and allows the person to express their grief in their own way.

Dealing with Grief

- **Highs and lows**
- **Involves extreme emotions**
- **No timetable**

As we progress through the grieving process, it is important to remember that grief has highs, lows and setbacks. It involves extreme emotions and behaviors. There is no timetable for grieving but some recovery after bereavement takes 18-24 months. However, for many the grieving process may be longer or shorter.

It is important to watch for, in ourselves and others, warning signs that normal grief has evolved into a more serious problem, such as clinical depression.

Signs of Clinical Depression

- **Difficulty functioning in daily life**
- **Extreme focus on death**
- **Excessive anger, bitterness or guilt**
- **Neglecting personal hygiene**
- **Alcohol or drug abuse**
- **Inability to enjoy life**
- **Withdrawing from others**
- **Constant feelings of hopelessness**

Watch for warning signs that normal grief has evolved into a more serious problem, such as clinical depression. These include (*Presenter review content on slide*)

It can be extremely difficult to bring up your concerns about these observations. Don't be intrusive but recognize the grieving person may benefit from professional help.

Instead of telling the person what to do, try stating your own feelings:

“I am troubled by the fact that you're not eating or sleeping---- maybe you should look into getting some help.”

More help for unresolved or complicated grief can be sought from family physicians, family clergy, counselors or support groups.

Sources of Help

Support Groups

Griefshare (loss of family or friend)– Griefshare.org/findagroup

Compassionate Friends (loss of a child)- compassionatefriends.org

Hotlines

Crisis Call Center – 775-774-8090

National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI) – 800-950-6264

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

National Helpline – 800-662-4357



*Thank
You!*

Any questions?

REFERENCES

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Mayo Clinic Healthy Living, 1998-2000, Complicated Grief

<https://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief> symptoms -causes

Smith , Melinda, M.A., Lawrence Robinson, and Jeanne Segal, PH.D., Coping with Grief, Last updated November 2019 <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss>

Understanding grief and loss, Approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board, March 2018

[https://www.medlineplus.gov/understanding/grief and loss](https://www.medlineplus.gov/understanding/grief-and-loss)

Westberg, Grandeur E., Good Grief, 1971, 1962 Fortress Press

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State Resource

<https://www.hellogrief.org>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com>

National Resource

<https://www.GreifShare.org>

<https://www.CareDimensions.org>



Please take a moment to provide feedback on this program.

1. Regarding the **overall program/teaching** (rate your response by circling a number):

Statement	Scale (1= Worst, 5 = Best)				
The value of the lesson was	1 not valuable	2	3	4	5 very valuable
The overall teaching was	1 poor	2	3	4	5 excellent
The teacher's knowledge of the lesson was	1 poor	2	3	4	5 excellent

2. Regarding **what you know and actions you plan to take** (circle your response):

- I learned new information today. YES NO
- I plan to use the information I learned today. YES NO
- I can help someone dealing with a loss. YES NO
- I can recognize the stages of grief. YES NO
- I can identify healthy responses to grief. YES NO

3. This lesson was delivered by a(n) (check only one):

_____ TEEA Member. _____ Extension Agent/Specialist _____ Other Speaker.

4. Please tell us about yourself.

I am a _____ Woman. _____ Man.

I am in District: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

I have been a member of TEEA for _____ years.

My age is _____ years-old.

5. Additional Comments.