Addressing Grief Issues in the Recovery Process

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Objective

- To recognize the losses in client’s lives that pre-date their use of AOD
- To identify how losses are compounded in addiction
- To validate the need for clients to experience and grieve their losses
- To understand what grief looks like, the tasks of the grieving process, myths related to grief and barriers to grieving

What is grief?

- It is the emotional response to loss of any kind
- We experience grief whenever we lose anything of importance

“But the night was ordinary. It usually is, I think, when your life changes. Most people aren’t doing anything special when the carefully placed pieces of their lives break apart.”

~ Carole Radziwill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4a9CKgLprQ
Three “N”s of grief

• Normal
• Natural
• Necessary

“To live is to experience loss”

• There are obvious losses and not-so-obvious losses
• Most people associate grief with death

Losses

• Death
• Relationship (divorce, break-up)
• Job (fired, laid off, down-sized)
• Moving
• Home
  * Health (illness, accidents)
  * Adoption/foster care
  * Adult children move back in
  * Raising grandchildren unexpectedly

* Trauma

Losses

• Abortion
• Miscarriage
• Stillbirth
• Infertility
• Loss of custody of a child
• Pets
• Retirement
• Empty nest
• Mental Illness
• Addiction

* Abuse - Physical, emotional, sexual
* Finances (bankruptcy, stock market crash, unemployment)
* Natural disasters (fire, flood, tornadoes)
* Crime (robbery, rape)
* Terrorism
• Failed test (CPA, Bar exam)
• Dream (Life didn’t turn out like you hoped/planned)

Trauma and grief often overlap
Dealing with loss and grief is a basic TASK OF LIFE

Judith Viorst / Necessary Losses

Passages

- Transition from infancy/childhood to attending school
- Graduation from school to workforce
- Marriage
- Having children
- Role reversal - caretaking for parents
- Changes in technology: industry; job

* Melody Beattie "The Grief Club: The Secret to Getting Through All Kinds of Change"

Passages

- Menopause
- Empty Nest
- Middle Age
- Old Age (loss of ability to drive, loss of memory, mental acuity, moving into a nursing home)
- Retirement
- Facing our mortality

Unresolved grief, loss and trauma often pre-date AOD use

Primary losses vs. secondary losses

- Primary loss—the most obvious loss
- Secondary loss—loss that comes as a result of the primary loss

Primary: Job loss

- Loss of income
- Loss of structure/routine
- Loss of role/title
- Loss of self-esteem
- Loss of security
Primary: Divorce
- Loss of role as husband/wife or couple
- Loss of home, church and community
- Loss of parenting kids full-time
- Loss of in-laws, shared friends
- Loss of income
- Loss of “forever” dream

How are losses compounded in addiction?
- Self-medication with AOD is contraindicated for those dealing with losses, unresolved grief or trauma
- AOD serve as a negative coping mechanism

AOD complicates healing
- Grieving process is blocked
- Disrupted sleep, especially stage four
- Increased anxiety and depression
- Impaired judgment and decision-making lead to more losses and trauma

AOD losses
- Death (Particularly with increase in heroin)
- Relationships (family & friends)
- Jobs
- Promotions
- Health
- Children (Parenting)
- Drop out of school

AOD losses
- Freedom/independence (jail, DUI’s)
- Professional licenses
- Victimization
- Life events

“Many recovering addicts grieve time they have lost with family, time lost in starting careers and potential opportunities that were lost. Recovering addicts compare the progress in their lives to that of their non-addicted peers and they appear to fall short. Their peers have moved on in their careers, have had families and have many amenities that a person in recovery may lack.”
Lost Time- William Berry
Permission to grieve

- Many clients have suppressed the pain from their losses
- People don’t believe they have a right to grieve and that grieving is necessary to their emotional health

“When we stop resisting, we stop fighting ourselves. We become partners instead of enemies with life.” Melody Beattie “The Grief Club”

Suppressed emotional pain

- Emotions are meant to be felt and expressed
- We’re taught from a young age by the response of others that painful emotions are somehow negative and should be denied or moved through quickly

Responses to grief

- “Quit your crying or I’ll give you something to cry about!”
- “Don’t cry, have a cookie.”
- “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.”

MYTHS OF DEALING WITH LOSS AND GRIEF
Don’t feel bad

Relating to death

Don’t feel bad

Relating to break-up

Don’t feel bad

Relating to children of divorcing parents

Don’t feel bad

Relating to miscarriage

Don’t feel bad

Academy Award Winning Grieving

Don’t feel bad

MYTH

MYTH

MYTH

MYTH

MYTH

- Negative, sad painful emotions are inappropriate
- Unconscious message we send others when they’re in pain
- Attempt to stop their crying, distract them, fix it, make it better

- Don’t feel bad … it was God’s will
- Don’t feel bad … his suffering is over
- Don’t feel bad … she’s in a better place
- Don’t feel bad … you did everything you could

- Don’t feel bad … there’s plenty of fish in the sea
- Don’t feel bad … he/she wasn’t right for you
- Don’t feel bad … you can enjoy being single and not tied down

- Don’t feel bad … this isn’t your fault
- Don’t feel bad … Mommy and Daddy still love you
- Don’t feel bad … Mommy and Daddy will have more one-on-one time with you

- Don’t feel bad … you’re still young
- Don’t feel bad … it was nature’s way of saying something wasn’t right
- Don’t feel bad … you already have kids
- Don’t feel bad … your baby is in heaven
- Don’t feel bad … at least you weren’t showing

- Lie about true feelings
- Fear of judgment
- Want other’s approval
- Want to be seen as strong and competent
- “I’m fine.”
Don’t talk, don’t feel

Most of us think addicts are addicted to drugs. Addicts are addicted to avoiding any uncomfortable feelings, things, situations, or responsibilities.”

~David Lee of Intervention Services, Inc.

MYTH 1

Don’t feel bad

ACOA issues

“T o spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.”

Dr. Erich Fromm

MYTH 1

Don’t feel bad

Freud’s Pleasure Principal

• Avoid pain and seek pleasure
• Addicted to avoiding any negative feelings or situations

MYTH 1

Don’t feel bad

MYTH 3

Time heals all wounds

Grieve alone
MYTH 4
Replace the loss

MYTH 5
Be strong for others and yourself

MYTH 6
Keep busy

Short-term energy releasing behaviors

- Help keep people busy
- What are they?
  - Coping mechanisms that allow for short-term relief
  - People use them for displacing their feelings following losses

S.T.E.R.B.S., Grief Recovery Institute

S.T.E.R.B.S.

- Food
- Fantasy (books, TV, movies)
- Video games
- Alcohol/drugs
- Sex

S.T.E.R.B.S.

- Workaholism
- Exercise
- Shopping
- Constant activity
What does grief look like?

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

What does grief look like?

"Grief is the conflicting group of human emotions caused by an end to or change in a familiar pattern of behavior."

- Reduced concentration, confusion
- Massive loss of energy
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Changed eating habits
- Anxiety, panic, feeling on edge, restlessness

Common responses/symptoms of grief

- Guilt
- Inability to return to normal routine
- Physical pain (headaches, stomachaches)
- Roller coaster ride of emotions/crying spells
- Feeling closer to God or further away from God

Always remember

- Grief is as individualized as someone's fingerprint
- No one will experience grief in the same way
- The intensity of grief is dependent on the significance of the person or thing lost
- No one can predict the time frame for healing of the manner in which grief will be expressed
Intuitive griever vs. Instrumental griever

Two Main Styles of Grieving, Kenneth Doka and Terry Martin

Intuitive griever
- Feelings are intensely experienced.
- Expressions such as crying and lamenting mirror the inner experience.
- Successful adaptive strategies facilitate the experience and expression of feelings.

Instrumental griever
- Mastery of oneself and the environment are most important.
- Problem-solving as a strategy enables mastery of feelings and control of the environment in creating the new normal.
- More likely to immerse themselves in activity.

What are the tasks we must help our clients with in the grieving process?

Identify and acknowledge their losses
- Use of a Loss History Graph
  - Purpose: To identify the losses in clients' lives and any patterns that developed from them
  - Help clients identify grief triggers
William Worden / Four Tasks of Mourning

First Task:
Accept the reality of the loss

Permission to grieve and feel the pain

• No way around grief, but through it
• Addicts are used to avoidance and immediate gratification

“Man when he does not grieve, hardly exists.”
“Antonio Porchia

Second Task:
Work through the pain of grief

“From sadness, fear, loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and anger to guilt, blame, shame, relief and countless others, there are many emotions a griever contends with. What is important in this task is acknowledging, talking about, and understanding these complex emotions in order to work through them. The danger, of course, is denying one’s feelings and avoiding them. This tendency can be exacerbated by society’s discomfort with the feelings that accompany grief, so the griever may feel like they shouldn’t feel or acknowledge these difficult emotions.”

William Worden

Permission to grieve and feel the pain

“I couldn’t find anyone to tell me each minute, whatever I experience is a valid, beautiful moment—however tragic it is. That’s what I needed to hear. Grief is a sacred time in our lives, and an important one.”

Melody Beattie “The Grief Club”

Permission to grieve and feel the pain

• Pain tolerance needs to be developed and supported
• Normalize the grief experience
• People need to tell their stories/ emotional validation

“Committing to our grief doesn’t mean we’re choosing to drown in sorrow; it means we’re choosing to heal our heart.”

Melody Beattie “The Grief Club”
How to get in touch with grief

- Life stories
- Relationship graphs
- Letter writing
- Art
- Journaling

Acceptance of self-care activities

- Permission to say “no” to outside commitments
- Permission to change routine/tradition
- Exercise, rest and nutrition
- Engage in enjoyed activities

Integration of loss with your life

- Making some kind of meaning out of the loss, even if it’s only having more compassion and understanding for others
- Sharing your losses with others/recognition of “I’m not alone”

Integration of loss with your life

- Getting involved in a cause/group—power of the group experience decreases the isolation and sense of powerlessness
- Help others identify new rituals/tributes
- Reaching a place of acceptance and gratitude

Integration of loss with your life

- Lack of safety and trust
- A lot of loss faced at once
- Unable to feel, been numb for a long time
- Feelings unfreeze, overwhelmed by emotion
- Lack of healthy coping skills
- Complicated by guilt/shame/stigma
Grieving the loss of AOD

- Secondary losses
  - Loss of significant relationships
  - Loss of self/identity
  - Loss of rituals “lifestyle” (partying, bars, experience of coping, cooking, using)
  - Loss of coping mechanisms (lying, manipulating)
  - Loss of culture of addiction (language, clothes, music)

How will you know if someone is in recovery from AOD?

“When they’re facing the uncomfortable feelings and situations.”

“David Lee

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern.” Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
Pain in life ... not optional

Misery and hopelessness ... optional

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference.

Reshaked Yawanda (1897-1975)

rosecrance.org