



MLCPC 209:

***Dealing with the Aftermath:
Grief, Loss, and Complicated Grief***

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Abstract

Crisis pregnancy workers will encounter many people with issues of grief and loss. It is critical for caregivers to have a basic understanding of grief and mourning but it is also critical that they understand the more subtle issues of unrecognized losses. This session will offer students a basic understanding of the processes of grief. It will address the types of grief specific to both unplanned pregnancy and pregnancy loss or abortion. It will also address how to identify these "unrecognized" losses and give practical recommendations for helping.

Learning Objectives

1. Participants will be able to identify types of loss and grief common to unplanned pregnancy, pregnancy loss, and abortion.
2. Participants will study disenfranchised grief or unrecognized losses and the potential consequences.
3. Participants will be able to articulate crisis intervention techniques for identifying and validating unrecognized losses.

I. Statistics

- A.** According to the American Pregnancy Association, every year in the United States approximately **2 million** women will experience pregnancy loss:¹
 - 1.** 600,000 pregnancy loss through miscarriage
 - 2.** 1,200,000 pregnancy loss through termination (abortion)
 - 3.** 64,000 pregnancy loss through ectopic pregnancy
 - 4.** 6,000 pregnancy loss through molar pregnancy
 - 5.** 26,000 pregnancy loss through stillbirth

- B.** Even when it is a loss that a woman has chosen, grief is still part of the healing process.

II. What is “Grief”?

- A.** Grief is a normal response to **loss**.

- B.** We commonly recognize grief as a response to loss of a loved one through death but people may experience grief with any type of loss.

- C.** There are common social and religious customs and rituals that help people in the grieving process.

- D.** How rituals help people grieve:
 - 1.** Helps them accept the loss
 - 2.** Allows them to express emotion
 - 3.** Opportunity to receive care and support while they mourn
 - 4.** People surround them to share condolences and memories
 - 5.** Helps them relocate the deceased to the past

III. Unrecognized Losses

- A. Disenfranchised Grief:** "Grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publically mourned."²

- B.** Very rarely do women who have had abortions get to grieve their loss.

- C. Consequences of Unrecognized/Ungrieved Losses:**
 - 1.** "The problem with suffering in silence is that you don't have the support you need when you need it most. Bottling up intense feelings leads to deep resentment and is stressful on the body, which can make you more vulnerable to illness."³
 - 2.** Physical Illness
 - 3.** Depression
 - 4.** Anxiety
 - 5.** Addiction
 - 6.** Relationship problems

- D. Types of losses experienced in an unplanned pregnancy situation:**
 - 1.** Loss of dreams
 - 2.** Loss of a relationship due to the unexpected pregnancy
 - 3.** Loss of the grandparents' dreams for their child

- E.** Experiencing grief in the present due to past, unrecognized losses.

- F.** Grief is like a debt that we have to pay.

IV. Techniques for Effective Coaching in Cases of Unrecognized Loss

A. Suspend Judgment

1. Allow her the safety of a place to tell her story and grieve her loss.
2. Allow all of those involved to grieve.

B. Ask questions to determine if there are any unrecognized losses.

C. Validate the loss and the pain and help the person understand that their feelings are legitimate.

1. Shame and guilt can compound any grief.
2. Clients need to be given the opportunity to work through this.

D. Help the client learn how to respond to hurtful/ignorant remarks or statements.

1. **Secondary wounds:** When one is already grieving something and others are disrespectful or say hurtful things in response to his/her situation.
2. Others have the capacity to say things that make the grief tremendously deeper.

V. Techniques for Grieving

A. Coaches may help women acknowledge their loss and memorialize their baby in a way that they couldn't or weren't allowed before.

1. Memorials
2. Rituals
3. Journaling/Letters

B. By telling their story and grieving their loss, these women may now move forward with the new story—the new plan—that God has for their life.

VI. Referrals

- A. If, as you get into talking about a woman's experience of abortion and grieving, you realize that she's had much more significant consequences, such as clinical depression, anxiety disorders, panic attacks, addiction, abusive relationships, eating disorders, self-mutilation, etc., you need to refer them to a professional Christian counselor immediately.
- B. Simply grieving the loss will not eliminate the mentioned consequences.

VII. Spiritual Interventions

- A. Your presence in the woman and/or family's lives will make an impact on them spiritually.
 - 1. Love them without judgment and condemnation.
 - 2. No sin that you see in your work as a crisis pregnancy coach is too much for the Lord to cover.
- B. Prayer is a therapeutic intervention.
 - 1. Even those who do not know the Lord rarely feel offended by prayer.
 - 2. "I don't tell the girls about Jesus. But, I tell Jesus about the girls."

Endnotes

¹"Statistics", *American Pregnancy Association*, accessed September 7, 2012,
<http://www.americanpregnancy.org/main/statistics.html>

²Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow* (New York: Lexington Books, 1989).

³Mary McCambridge, Foundation for Grieving Children.

Appendix A

Grief and Loss

Eric Scalise, Ph.D.

Grief Defined

- Grief can only be experienced when there has been **a loss** of an **intimate relationship** or some other object of concern, and/or affection.
- We **grieve because we love** and the fact remains that sometimes, love hurts – otherwise we will withdraw from life, only to exist in **an emotional exile** – never able to benefit from or feel the joys of the human experience.
- Grief is the active and intentional decision to face the pain associated with the loss.
- **Rarely are there easy answers** to events that seem so inherently tragic and untimely – things like rape, suicide, murder, abduction, divorce, children with cancer, sexual abuse, the death of a spouse, natural disasters, a mastectomy, job loss, combat fatalities...the list is endless.
- Over **2.5 million** people die every year in this country.
- Grief is also a **normal response** that often includes feelings of intense sorrow, anger, loneliness, depression, and possible physical symptoms.
- There is **no set timeframe** for how long people should grieve – it can take months or in some cases, years.

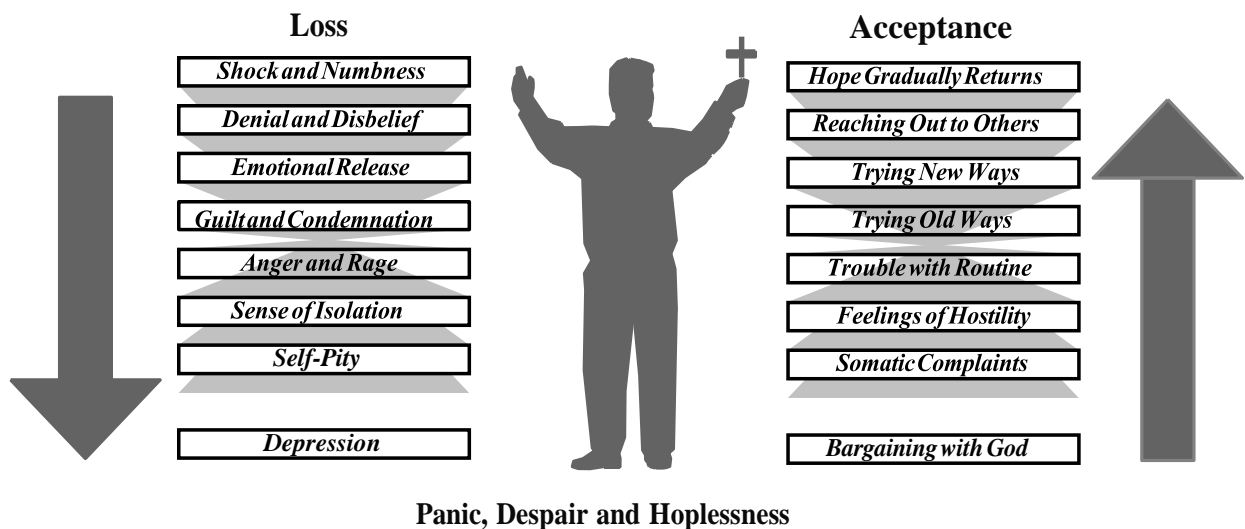
The Nature and Consequences of Grief

- Grief is often **crisis oriented**.
- Even though **grief and loss are universal**, how a person approaches the event and its aftermath, is **unique and individual**.
- **C.S. Lewis** – “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciousness, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to a deaf world.”
- The **pain is often crushing** – sleep becomes fitful – questions constantly intrude into our waking moments...and sometimes our dreams at night.

- The “**dark night of the soul**” can be overwhelming at times and consume a person’s will to survive the emotional storm.
- **Factors** that help determine the **intensity**, **severity**, and **duration** of a grief response include:
 - the **type of loss** that was experienced – violent death can be overwhelming
 - **prior knowledge** and anticipation
 - a person’s **support systems** or lack thereof
 - a person’s **belief system**
- The most human of all questions are the “**Why?**” questions – Jesus asked a “Why?” question on the cross that was never answered.

The Grief Cycle (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross – a doctor in Switzerland)

- **The Shock Stage** – initial paralysis after becoming aware of the loss
- **The Denial Stage** – trying to avoid the inevitable
- **The Anger Stage** – the frustrated outpouring of bottled up emotion
- **The Bargaining Stage** – seeking in vain for a way out
- **The Depression Stage** – final realization of the inevitable
- **The Testing Stage** – seeking realistic solutions
- **The Acceptance Stage** – finally finding a way out

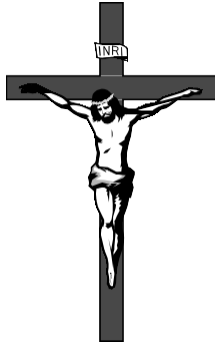


“He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” **Isaiah 53:3**

Complicated Grief

- It's when a person becomes "**stuck**" and struggles to break free from the powerful grip of traumatic circumstances – **unresolved issues** remain with **little or no closure**.
- It's an extreme version of normal feelings and can have some of the **same symptoms of PTSD**.
- It's not necessarily rooted in inadequate coping skills, but more connected to the **original relationship** with a person, object, process, etc.
- Other **symptoms** include:
 - difficulty speaking about the event
 - constantly bringing up themes of death and/or loss (even in casual conversations)
 - ongoing sleep and/or appetite disturbances
 - sudden or radical changes in lifestyles and schedules
 - self-destructive behaviors
 - excessive avoidance and isolation
 - significant impairment in functionality at home, work, or school
 - strong reactions are triggered by minor events
- One UCLA study showed that the **brain reacts differently** under conditions of complicated grief – the **nucleus accumbens** (the area where people experience reward and pleasure) is activated – may seem odd when first considered, but the researchers found that with the **intense and painful longing** of a person or object, it actually creates a neural path of increased seeking.
- Approximately **10-20%** of all grief is classified as complicated grief.
- **Dynamics** that can lead to the **formation** of complicated grief include the following:
 - the **mode** of the loss was considered incomprehensible, senseless, tragic, or preventable – the Columbine or Virginia Tech shootings
 - the loss is considered exceptionally **untimely** – you see this with child deaths
 - the survivor feels a **sense of guilt** because they participated in the event that caused the loss
 - there was an **extreme dependency** on the lost loved one which provided much of the person's sense of self-worth, self-confidence, or meaningfulness in life
 - the mourner's work, family, or environmental circumstances **disallow or discourage the expression of grief** – military culture can be like that ("pain is weakness leaving the body")
 - there is **excessive attachment** and proximity to a deceased person's possessions

- there is a **premature “jumping back”** into normal activities without allowing time and space to grieve a loss



"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, but He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our wellbeing fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." Isaiah 53:4-5

Caregiving Tips

- Encourage discussion about death before it occurs (e.g. in cases of long-term illness anticipating death).
- Be physically present and available but don't assume that means there needs to be constant conversation.
- Let the grieving person(s) know that expressing feelings is acceptable and beneficial, but not in such a way that they feel forced to do so.
- Don't be overly surprised at outbursts of tears and anger, or withdrawal.
- Help the grieving person make decisions without feeling the pressure to make major decisions right away if unnecessary (e.g. the selling of the home).
- Gently challenge any pathological or irrational responses to the loss.
- Let your support and concern also be toward the practical and tangible (e.g. meals, errands, watching the children, etc.).
- Don't discourage grieving rituals when they can help bring closure, comfort and support.
- Pray for and with the grieving person, comfort with your words and with Scripture, but don't preach or use religious clichés.
- Help the person understand that grieving is a process and that what they are feeling is not necessarily abnormal.

A Theology of Suffering and Hope

Bringing Balance

- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18** – “We do not want to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you may not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus...Therefore comfort one another with these words.”
- **1 Corinthians 15:16-20, 55-57** – “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep...O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Revelation 21:1-5** – “Then I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there was no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’ and He said, ‘Write for these words are faithful and true.’”