



Sr. Dorothy Ann Kelly, O.S.U.
LIFELONG ENRICHMENT SERIES

Universal Loss and Grief

October 22, 2022

Panelists:

- Carol Corliss, CNR SAS '75, author of *Yanking Bittersweet*
- Catherine Bell Kempthorne, CNR SAS '75
- Mary Ellen McEvily, CNR SAS '65



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Session Overview:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Setting Expectations for the Session
- Concept of Loss
- Common Grief Reactions
- Factors Affecting the Grief Response
- Tasks of Mourning
- Helpful Strategies to Promote Healing and Resilience
- Reflections
- Closing Remarks



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October 22, 2022

Concept of Loss:

- Loss of a loved one
- Loss of a marriage, a relationship
- Loss of a job, a home, a homeland
- Loss of one's reputation, one's self-identity
- Loss of freedom, independence, self-determination
- Loss of a body part, health, memory
- Loss of safety, sense of well-being

“When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably, we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding.” --Helen Keller



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October 22, 2022

Common Grief Reactions:

- **Feelings** of shock, bewilderment, numbness, sadness, denial, anxiety, guilt, anger, loneliness, depression, yearning, and relief
- **Thought patterns** characterized by confusion, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, and preoccupation with the loss
- **Physical reactions** such as tightness in the chest, nausea, dizziness, headache, fatigue, vague pains, vulnerability to illness, and difficulty sleeping
- **Behaviors** such as frequent crying, loss of interest in eating, loss of interest in enjoyable activities or being social, restlessness, excessive activity, irritability, and combativeness
- **A Questioning** of one's faith or view of the world, or, conversely, a strengthening of those beliefs



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Factors Affecting the Grief Response:

- Familial relationship to the person who died (spouse? child? parent? sibling?)
- Emotional closeness to (or estrangement from) the person who died
- Circumstances of death (Was it sudden? Was it after a long illness? Was it a suicide? Was an accident or a crime involved?)
- One's age and gender
- One's previous experience with loss, and one's coping style
- Availability of social supports
- Financial impact of the loss



Tasks of Mourning:

J. William Worden's four "Tasks of Mourning":

- Accept the reality of the loss
- Work through the pain of grief
- Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
- Find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life

Universal Loss and Grief

October 22, 2022



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October 22, 2022

Helpful Strategies to Promote Healing and Resilience:

- Work through your grief, instead of hiding or running from it
- Take breaks from grieving
- Be patient with the process
- Talk with others about how you feel
- Find a balance between solitude and staying connected with family/friends
- Keep a journal, write poetry
- Cultivate new interests and talents
- Stay active physically
- Spend time in nature
- Get adequate sleep and nourishment
- Maintain reassuring routines



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Helpful Strategies (continued):

- Accept that loss is an unavoidable aspect of life
- Adopt attitudes of hope, trust, gratitude, and positivity
- Cherish the gift of time and life that remains
- Transform grief into something positive by helping others
- Pay forward the kindnesses you have received
- Forgive yourself for things you said or did, or for things you failed to do
- Consider joining a support group or an online support network
- Seek counseling if grief is very intense and does not seem to be diminishing with time



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Reflections on Hope, Trust, and Healing:

“Hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without full closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves.”

--Richard Rohr, *founder, Center for Action & Contemplation*

“Can we try, even a little bit, to believe in spring? To believe in its witness to the economy of creation—that nothing is lost, nothing is wasted? And that our loved one, too, is transformed into new life? If we can believe that, then the abundance we see around us can give us courage and hope, as well as a nourishing feast for our senses, here and now.”

--Martha W. Hickman, *Healing After Loss*



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Reflections on Hope, Trust, and Healing (continued):

Birdwings

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror up to where you're bravely working.

*Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.*

*Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,
you would be paralyzed.*

*Your deepest presence
is in every small contracting and expanding,
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated
as birdwings.*

--Rumi, Sufi mystic and poet (translation, Coleman Barks)



Universal Loss and Grief
October 22, 2022

Appendix:

Some material adapted from:

<https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/grief-and-loss> (retrieved 8/9/2022)

Additional source material from:

Corliss, Carol A. *Yanking Bittersweet: Stories of Widows Coming to Terms with Grief*. Middletown CT, 2021.

Doka, Kenneth. *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner, 4th Ed.* New York: Springer 2009.