

**STUCK IN PAIN: EVIDENCE-BASED
STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS IN THE
TREATMENT OF GRIEF AND LOSS**

1

PRESENTED BY
Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge, R.N., Ed.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Grand Rapids, Michigan & Atlanta, Georgia
Robert C. DeVries, D.Min., Ph.D.
Prof. at Calvin Theological Seminary - Emeritus
Grand Rapids, Michigan & Atlanta, Georgia

2

**I. Formulating a Healthy and Accurate Grief
Platform for Your Client to Understand
the Grief Journey.**

3

A. Why do people grieve, anyway?

1. Primarily because they *loved* the person; intertwined life with him/her, and are in a relationship connected together with reciprocal roles played by each.
2. When the attachment is broken with a person integral in one's life, an automatic, universal response is elicited called "GRIEF."
3. Grief consists of many symptoms overwhelming a person causing confusion, yearning, disbelief and a definite loss of direction along with a myriad of other emotions (positive and negative).
4. When a person grieves, it definitely reflects a tribute and honor of the importance & significance of that person. It says "you were valuable to me."
5. Grieving affects all 5 components of an individual – cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical and spiritual.

4

**B. So, what is an accurate portrayal of the grief
journey? Things clients need to know:**

1. Grieving is a journey or process that begins when a person dies.
2. Effective grieving necessitates 3 ingredients:
 - a. The passage of time.
 - b. Intentional and active hard work.
 - c. Motivation to get *through* the grief journey.
3. "Normal grief" takes a minimum of 1 year to work through, most often 2 to 3 years before completing the journey.
4. To get through grief, there is a prescriptive framework of goals that need to be accomplished.

5

**C. What is the *FRAMEWORK* of the goals grieving people need to
understand that is so critical to healing?**

1. Understand the framework of grieving consisting of goals to accomplish:
 - a. **Goals involving the deceased - Loss-oriented:**
 - 1) Accept the reality of the death.
 - 2) Express and work through all the feelings.
 - 3) Sort/summarize/memorize/and move the deceased to the past.
 - b. **Goals focusing on the bereaved - Restoration-oriented:**
 - 1) Reformulate one's identity without the deceased.
 - 2) Reinvest fully in life with a reconstructed "new normal."
2. Planting Seeds: Helpful premises to launch and frame grieving further.
 - a. People are on "loan" to us. We don't "own" them. They are gifts.
 - b. Person who died had positive and negative characteristics like everyone else.
 - c. Avoiding difficult situations gives power to those situations.
 - d. Facing painful things is necessary for healing.

Worden 2018
Stroebe & Schulz 1995

6

II. Help Your Client Understand Grieving Can Become Prolonged.

7

A. WHAT DOES STUCK MEAN?

- 1. Involves two primary characteristics:
 - a. A lack of improvement in symptoms over time.
 - b. A significant impact on ability to function in daily life.
- 2. Dx officially in DSM-V-TR is Prolonged Grief Disorder (March, 2020).
 - a. First called Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) by Prigerson (2009).
 - b. Previously referred to as "Complicated Grief" by Horowitz (1997).
 - c. Loss of a loved one for adults had to occur a year ago.
- 3. 7 to 10% of individuals experiencing grief are Dx with Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD).

8

B. WHAT CAUSES GRIEVERS TO GET "STUCK:" THE IMPACT OF MYTHS, BIASES, AND INACCURATE INFORMATION.

- 1. A widely held but false belief or idea = **MYTH**.
 - a. **Psychologically**
 - 1) Suppress emotions to just "look good"/get approval.
 - 2) Don't talk or think about the deceased's death so you don't hurt.
 - 3) It is disloyal to get "over" the grief from the death of a loved one.
 - 4) Believe that "moving on" says you didn't love the deceased.
 - 5) If you get done grieving, it says you have forgotten the deceased.
 - 6) Avoid making yourself experience pain on purpose.
 - b. **Spiritually**
 - 1) If you have faith and believe in God, you don't need to grieve.
 - 2) If your loved one is in heaven, there is no need to grieve.
 - 3) Just turn your grief and pain **ALL** over to God.
 - 4) Focus only on the joy and celebration part of death.

9

- 2. Maintaining **BIASES** or prejudice about grieving.
 - a. "I just want to continue like I was living my life and ignore my loss."
 - b. "There's nothing I can do about the situation to bring my loved one back, so I'll just be sad, angry, and bitter the rest of my life."
- 3. Holding onto to **MISINFORMATION** expressed as "common knowledge."
 - a. There is nothing you need to learn about grieving. Just let it run its course.
 - b. Just do your own thing. Grieving is totally unique to each person.
 - c. Listen to unwise advice, such as:
 - 1) Just give it time; 3-6 months and you'll start to feel better.
 - 2) Keep busy; put your focus on pleasant and enjoyable things.
 - 3) Go back to doing all the things you were involved with.
 - 4) You'll never get "over" it, but you'll learn to live with the death. It doesn't ever end. It's something a person has to live with.
 - d. I'll just sit back and wait the pain out. There's nothing else to do.
 - e. I will just go on, behave like I'm happy, and make the best of this awful situation.

10

C. How does a bereaved person deal with Myths, Biases and Inaccurate Information? Use evidence-based treatment protocol to change what a person tells him/herself: Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT/Ellis 1955).

A-B-C Model

A = Activating event
B = Belief held about the event.
C = Emotional Consequences

C is not affected much by A, but is largely impacted by B, contrary to popular thinking.

11

A strategy to utilize with an individual who functions with **MYTHS, BIASES AND MISINFORMATION.**

A strategy that utilizes cognitive restructuring to change what an individual tells him/herself to reframe thinking, involving 3 primary steps:

- a. Identify irrational myths, biases or misinformation.
- b. Actively challenge these errant beliefs in one's mind through valid rational means to help change one's thought patterns.
- c. Continue to use helpful, positive self-talk to counter negative viewpoints.

12

D. Examples of changing irrational beliefs to rational ones.

<u>Irrational</u>	<u>Rational</u>
Rigid and extreme evaluation of the event: "Life is worthless without him/her."	Flexible evaluation of the event: "Life has changed forever."
Inconsistent with reality: "It's intolerable, awful, I can't think of it."	Consistent with reality: "It is difficult without him/her."
Unacceptability of life without him/her: "It's too painful to think of him/her. I avoid it."	Acceptance of life without him/her: "Whenever I think of him/her it's sad and painful. I miss him/her."
Life is "frozen" and lost its meaning: "Life is meaningless."	Continuing search for meaning for life: "I will think of ways to remember her."
You'll never get over grieving. "My future is gone - I'll just be existing now"	Begin to imagine a new life style. "The only way to deal with this grief is to work through it (Ps. 23)"

13

III. Significant Ingredients Necessary to Be Able to Complete the Grief Journey to Move Forward.
(Objective #1)

14

A. Necessary PSYCHOLOGICAL behaviors or tasks for a grieving person to work through that are focused on the DECEASED.

1. **Have a service of some type for the deceased loved one.**
 - a. Signifies the completion of the deceased's life on this earth.
 - b. Functions to acknowledge the pain of parting and the summary of a life lived here.
 - c. Provides a supportive community for each other paying tribute and honoring the deceased.
 - d. Look through picture books of the deceased and life with that person, either individually or as a family/friends to utilize at some point during the service.
 - e. Write an obituary and plan funeral/celebration/memorial service and perhaps give a eulogy.
 - f. Revisit the cemetery and go see the headstone when delivered, bring flowers, etc.

15

A. 1. con't
Research supported by NFDA: "Value of a Funeral". NFDA, Nov. 28, 2022

1. Showed value of attending funerals in person.
2. Participants found service meaningful and healing.
3. Was helpful to pay tributes and say good-bye to the physical body of the deceased.
4. 56% attending in-person services thought a viewing of the body was important for reality orientation.

16

2. **Settle the deceased's estate, dealing with all the legal aspects.**
 - a. Read the will and/or trust and adhere to the deceased's wishes.
 - b. Change the ownership of property, titles, monetary assets, etc.
 - c. Remove tangible connections of communication (e.g. personal cell phone; email accounts; personal checking and investment accounts; address return labels bearing his/her name; etc.).
 - d. Complete financial responsibilities, e.g., debts, mortgages, bills, etc.

17

3. **Go through all of the deceased loved one's belongings, memorabilia, activity/interests "stuff."**
 - a. Look at, sort, and decide how and what to keep, distribute or donate after recalling, letting emotions come to the surface, and realize the loved one won't wear or use these things again.
 - b. Utilize all one's senses in the sorting through the process (e.g., smell, touch, put on, wear).
 - c. Realize the primary griever takes the lead in going through the possessions of the deceased and *then* invites others to participate or give input as he/she desires.
 - d. Keep what is wanted as a remembrance to look at, wear, or utilize as a transitional object.

18

4. Revisit activities, places, people, including all the things the person grieving did with the deceased to reminisce but also to determine if that is still important and desired to continue doing that by him/herself.

- a. Make a list of all the interests and activities you participated in with the deceased.
- b. Name your and/or the deceased's favorite restaurants, parks, cultural events, vacation spots you enjoyed with the person who died and return to them, journal memories, and give emotional expression to those experiences. Then assess if you wish to do those again.

19

5. Talk about the deceased with others including things about his/her life and death.

- a. Use the words "dead" and "died" to signify the finality of what happened to your loved one.
- b. Journal about the life of the person who died in relationship to the person grieving.
- c. Write a letter to the deceased about what was appreciated or not so much in that relationship.
- d. Realistically describe him or her – both the positive and negative aspects.
- e. Journal about the deceased's dying process and actual death and subsequent funeral/memorial service.

20

6. Keep a journal of situations, events, and significant occurrences in daily life including both the griever's thoughts and feelings.

- a. Identify, work through and resolve unsettling or negative feelings lingering from the relationship, dying process, and/or death (e.g., anger, guilt, regret, disbelief, hurt, sadness, etc.).
- b. Write a letter to the deceased about things you have negative feelings about and when ready, apologize or forgive. Do similar with any negative (or positive) feeling you need or want to express.
- c. Educate the client regarding how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are inherent within each of us and the distinguishing features of each.
- d. Talk about what is encompassed in being **congruent** and the benefits to one's self-esteem as well as the dangers of remaining silent.

21

7. Identify and journal all the roles played by the deceased as well as the person grieving that are no longer available to the person grieving. Both remember and appreciate, but also begin to decide how to accomplish those that need to be continued in order to maintain one's ongoing life at present.

22

8. Elicit and cultivate social support and strengthen on-going positive relationships.

- a. When assistance is offered, accept it gratefully with specific tasks that would be helpful.
- b. Evaluate all of the griever's current relationships and determine which ones are desirable to embrace and grow and the ones to decrease contact with.

23

9. Have no unresolved issues, feelings or situations related to the deceased that haven't been dealt with to the fullest extent possible.

- a. Be able to say "I have cleared my slate related to my loved one's death, life and interactions."
- b. Have attended to all tasks and behaviors you can think of that involved your deceased loved one.
- c. Make a decision that you will obviously never forget the deceased but will hold him/her in your heart and memory.
- d. DECIDE when you are ready to move forward.

24

10. Have experienced the first full year of grieving at a very minimum including the first anniversary of the deceased's date of death.

- a. Holidays and special occasions when family and friends congregate can be very emotional because no longer is the group "all together" in it's previous form, that time is often very painful and a dreaded event.
- b. It appears from research and anecdotes that it is helpful to make PLANS with those involved to assess what would be important to do for each person and try to include those if that is OK with the group, or have those individuals that feel ready, go ahead and do them without the others.

25

11. If widowed, when you are ready to do so, remove your wedding ring from the 4th finger of your left hand and leave that finger empty. Find another finger or other suitable location for the ring.

- a. Most people, in some fashion, say something to the effect of "till death do us part" in their marriage vows to one another. The reality is that one of the two has died, so the other is no longer married.
- b. Removing the wedding ring is a very difficult thing for a widowed person to consider, but it is also a symbolic behavior that denotes the marriage has ended. The person is, in fact, acknowledging he/she now has the status of being *single again*.

26

12. Say a final "good-bye" to the deceased.

- a. Do something symbolic in moving the deceased from the present to the past tense to acknowledge the finality of the relationship here on earth.
- b. The relationship now only exists in a person's head (memories) and heart (how the deceased impacted the bereaved).
- c. Write a good-bye letter and read it at a significant place (e.g., cemetery or other meaningful place in the deceased's life) for closure of a present tense relationship with the deceased.

27

Therapy Approaches and Evidence-Based Research That Support These Behavioral Related Tasks:

1. The Tasks of Grief by William Worden, 2003.
2. The Dual Process Approach by Stroebe & Schut, 1995.
3. Complicated Grief Therapy (CGT) by M.K. Shear & S. Zisook, 2020.
4. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-CBT used with REBT, by A. Beck, 1970.

Additionally, please refer to the List of References in the back of this handout.

28

B. Necessary SPIRITUAL behaviors or tasks for the person grieving to work through that are FOCUSED ON THE DECEASED.

1. Obviously, it is of paramount importance to assess where a client is spiritually before implementing interventions in order to help provide appropriate hope and assurance.

29

2. Providing the client embraces the Biblical truths about death and grief—discuss the helpfulness of these verses for the person who is grieving:

- a. Death was never God's intention. Death came as a result of humankind's disobedience. (Genesis 3:1-7)
- b. In declaring that Adam & Eve would surely die if they disobeyed His one command, God was implying a warning, not a threat. (Genesis 2:15-17)
- c. Grief following a death is real in Scripture, and grief is not to be minimized. (John 11:35)
- d. Christians have assurance that death is not the end; it is the means of transition to eternity. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
- e. Grief, mourning, and pain will be totally destroyed at Christ's return. (Rev. 21:4)
- f. If the deceased was a believer, he/she is now in heaven. (John 3:16)

30

3. Utilize these Biblical perspectives that can elicit hope and assurance for the individual who is grieving.

- a. There is a time to be born and a time to die (Eccl. 3:2).
- b. God's timing is different than ours; we don't see the whole picture.
- c. God is not out of control, but he does allow difficulty, sadness and pain.
- d. Christians do grieve, but not without hope (1 Thess. 4:13).
- e. Biblical lament is part of the grief process, but arises from a foundation of faith (Ps. 22:1, Ps.22:22).
- f. Grieving is a temporary state. God expects us to grieve because of attachment. We were created to be in relationship with others (Jer. 31:13).
- g. God's sovereignty and caring encompasses everything.
- h. God "walks" with us through every situation, including grief in our life (Ps. 23:4, Is. 43:2).
- i. Christ is preparing a place for us in heaven for after we die (Jn, 14:2).
- j. Earthly relationships are not the same in heaven.

31

C. Implement meaning oriented therapy to help the bereaved determine a meaning for his/her loved one's death.

1. Principle Tenet:

People are driven by a need to find some benefit or create a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, based on human's search for meaning in life.

(J. Fleener, 2017).

2. Aspects of Meaning:

1. **Sense making** = creating understanding of loss for oneself, e.g. everyone dies at some point.
2. **Benefit finding** = seek positives resulting from that loss, e.g. deceased is in heaven, perfect, with no pain or suffering.
3. **Identity change** = the positive or negative reconstruction of self; how will death impact the griever's "new normal?" e.g., wants to live each day to the fullest!
3. Discuss with the grieving person as to how he/she understands the "why" and related questions regarding his/her loved one's death in order to make some personal meaning for the death.

32

D. Meaning Making is:

- a. Utilized in many cognitive and trauma therapies.
- b. Also used in attachment theory – Bowlby (1980) where the bereaved works to redefine his/her relationship with deceased through meaning reconstruction.
- c. If a person can't make meaning, he/she is 4x more likely to meet criteria for complicated grief. Cf. Laurie Pearlman (2014) "Treating Traumatic Bereavement."
- d. Niemeyer also sees meaning-making as important; even if the meaning is "no meaning can be made," so I am going to put this thing to rest.

33

5. The Ramifications of Faith When Grieving.

- a. Research supports the premise that religious faith is helpful to grievers in providing a conceptual base of understanding of the "whys".
- b. Having faith in God also:
 - 1) Enhances one's ability to face the pain of grieving and do the "tough stuff".
 - 2) Gives needed strength and assurance that the griever is understood, supported, and helped by God to get through the journey (Ps. 23 "I will be with you.")
 - 3) Provides the assurance that the deceased loved one is in "a better place" and is no longer suffering or burdened by this earthly life.

34

IV. Achieving a Redefined and Reconstructed Sense of Self (Identity, Values and Worth) Following the Death of a Loved One.

(objective #2)

35

A. Challenges encountered in the process of reconstructing one's life.

1. Dealing with apathy; lack of motivation; fatigue.
2. Not wanting things to change in his/her life. He/she liked who he/she was with and because of the person who died.
3. Believing his/her goals and/or purposes had ended with their loved one's death, and they now just exist; there's nothing left for them.
4. Experiencing a decrease in self-esteem and validation with the role relationship no longer available as a result of the death.

36

A. con't - Ways to help frame these challenges:
 Validate for the bereaved individual that these challenges are considered to be "normal" and part of the grief journey.

- a. Example: "Humpty-Dumpty" – Reconstruction of self.
- b. Example: "Alice in Wonderland" – Redefinition of self.

37

B. Complete a reconstructed identity following the death of a loved one.

1. Make your own life-line which helps determine where you have been and where you are now. To do so:
 - a. Draw a horizontal line across the paper and put your birthdate on it.
 - b. Follow that with longitudinal lines or markers to denote significant events, both positive and negative in scope, that have occurred so far.
 - c. Include markers to denote when your relationship with the deceased began and ended, and see the line that has continued along since the time of the loved one's death.
2. Encourage the person grieving to realize he/she began life solo and typically ends that way as well as with death.

38

B. Reconstructing Identity... (continued)

3. Write the life story of both the "highs" and "lows" of your relationship with the person who died, and how that person contributed to your life.
 - a. Write a letter of gratefulness and appreciation for all the positive ways the deceased affected and "rubbed off" on your life, and read it out loud to an empty chair that resembles "talking" to the deceased.
 - b. Write a separate letter to the deceased about what you wish would have been different in your relationship that each of you contributed to, apologize if necessary, and then read what you wrote out loud as well.

39

C. Help the person grieving assess if FORGIVENESS needs to occur and realize the damage, both psychologically and Biblically, of holding a grudge vs. working toward resolution.

- a. **Forgiveness IS an action, decision, and process that:**
 - 1) Disempowers the offending party.
 - 2) Decreases anger, depression, and anxiety.
 - 3) Increases self-esteem, self-control and emotional stability.
 - 4) Allows for a clean slate.
 - 5) Strengthens relationships.
 - 6) Promotes peace.

40

b. Forgiveness is NOT:

- 1) Contingent on an apology.
- 2) A legal pardon.
- 3) An agreement condoning or excusing the "wrong" or hurtful behavior.
- 4) Not forgetting – rather it's a reframing of situation.
- 5) Recreating a solid, intimate relationship.
- 6) Not even necessarily face to face conversation with the other person.

41

D. Explore "Who am I now??" by identifying goals that you could implement in your developing reconstructed life as you take steps to move forward.

1. Identify how you would describe yourself as you completed high school and/or college (physically, emotionally, interests, gifts, activities, etc. as well as your hopes and dreams for the future).
2. Describe how you would identify yourself in relationship with the person you are grieving. What were you to that person and he/she to you, and where are the "holes" that are present because of his/her death?
3. Determine who you are now in relation to what you value (what is important to you), your beliefs, and how you choose to live now.
4. Compiling goals, hopes, dreams, and interests from your past experiences, what do you want to pursue as you move through your grief and finally complete your journey? What do you see yourself doing? (work/career, hobbies, interests, roles to play, volunteer opportunities).
5. What skills, characteristics, behaviors would you like to develop or implement as you move into this new chapter or volume of your life?

42

E. Have dealt with property or your present living space if you lived with the deceased. If you are responsible for the residence, you have made changes to the appearance and function to suit you.

1. The common rule is not to make any major decisions during your first year of bereavement or better yet, 2-3 years.
2. What about the size and upkeep of the house? Will it still be manageable considering the upkeep and finances?
3. Consider the location. Do you want to consider a move and to where? If possible, delay major decisions about housing and where to live until you are through your grief journey.

43

F. Have completed estate planning based on new life circumstances due to your loved one's death.

1. Reread your past Will and/or Trust and note the changes necessary because of the death of your loved one and your redefined perspective resulting from the death.
2. See an attorney to legally complete the necessary changes to your estate planning.

44

G. Have made your own funeral plans.

1. Make an appointment for funeral planning at the funeral home you wish to have your family use at the time of your death. Meet with them and make arrangements so your wishes are written down for your family.
2. If you wish, you could write a skeleton obituary and also select songs, passages, or whatever else you would like included in the service.

45

V. Redefining Oneself Following a Death: Growth Through Loss both Psychologically and Spiritually.

(objective #3)

46

A. Psychological growth related to SELF.

1. Recognize what is really important in life – a process of reprioritizing.
2. Develop more of a detailed philosophical meaning of your life here on earth and ways to contribute to your world. (Dr. Seuss)
3. Understand you are here a relatively short time to make some contribution and difference, and then your time on earth is over.
4. Realize you need to live each day to the fullest, as though it could possibly be your last.
5. Recognize that with every encounter throughout your day, you have an opportunity to “rub off” on people and perhaps serve as a role model.
6. Realize if you don’t reach out and meet people, help people, etc., you’ll never experience much connectedness and spontaneity. Learn to risk some things since “nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

47

B. Psychological growth related to FAMILY AND OTHERS.

1. Recognize each individual in your life is “on loan” to you, not necessarily here for your entire life span.
2. Realize that each person has value, worth, and some good in them.
3. Appreciate those family members in your life for what they are and how they contribute to your life. They are a gift to you to expand your thinking and develop more fully.
4. Recognize that a primary value in your life is the relationships you have with family, friends, and others.
5. Value spending time together as a family and having meaningful conversations with them.

48

C. Spiritual growth related to GOD.

1. God loves and cares for you more than is comprehended.
2. He is not surprised or caught off guard by what is coming into your life.
3. God created humankind in His image so you have the capacity to exude kindness, connection, love, caring, humbleness, etc.
4. God knows all that occurs and cares deeply about humankind.
5. God created us whole and complete within ourselves.
6. God has plans and purposes for you.
7. Each individual is equally precious in God's sight.
8. God uses evil for His good.
9. God can use loss and grief for spiritual growth.

49

OUTCOMES OF THE GRIEF JOURNEY

1. Most often develops an understanding and acceptance that death happens to everyone.
2. Decreases the fear of dying and death, and learns to face death head on.
3. Strengthens a faith and stronger spiritual belief system.
4. Develops an effective coping system for life by reprioritizing the importance of things and develops resilience and strategies to deal with challenges.
5. As a result, builds confidence, self-esteem, with hope and assurance to move forward without fear.
6. Creates positive identity changes with noted growth.
7. Develops more empathy toward others.
8. Realizes life on earth is short, and strives to live more fully.

50