Group Diversity Presentation Outline:

Grief, Loss, and Death on Individual and Family Development

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**Developmental Stages and Adjustment/Maladjustment**

**Differentiating Grief and Loss**

- Two Stage Theories from our textbook (Comstock, 2005)
  - Kübler-Ross’ 5 Stages of Grief: denial, 2) bargaining, 3) anger, 4) despair, 5) acceptance. **Adjustment:** Kübler-Ross suggests that through working through the stages, one will reach acceptance. **Maladjustment:** Some struggle with death to the end (Comstock, 2005). Some go back and and revisit former stages several times (What’s Your Grief, 2016).
  - Viorst’s Stage Theory of Grief: 1) Shock, disbelief, 2) Pain, longing, 3) “We begin to recover some energy…” (Comstock, 2005). **Adjustment:** From the integration of the loss (Comstock, 2005). **Maladjustment:** Some go back and revisit former stages (What’s Your Grief, 2016).
- Two Contemporary Grief Theories
  - Wordens’s 4 Tasks of Mourning: 1) Accept, 2) Work, 3) Adjust, 4) Find enduring connection (What’s Your Grief, 2016) **Adjustment:** Finding an enduring connection. **Maladjustment:** A stigmatized death (What’s Your Grief, 2016).
  - Niemeyer’s Constructivist Psychotherapy: How people construct meaning after loss (Niemeyer, 2016). **Adjustment:** Making meaning out of a loss. **Maladjustment:** Violent or primary attachment loss may increase the likelihood of complicated grief (CG) (Rozalska, Hollanda, & Neimeyer, 2016).

**Counseling Considerations Related to Grief, Loss, and Death**

- The grief counselor can be there to companion, not to fix (J. Buntrock, personal communication, November 4, 2016)
- Empathy skills are beneficial at this time
- Be aware of symptoms that require attention from a physician, while not pathologizing grief
  - Strong emotions that prevent client from sleeping, working, eating and self-care
  - Counselor’s responsibility to refer client to a physician if behaviors cause severe dysfunction
- A direct, honest approach is best (Kanel, 2014)

**Counseling Principles and Procedures**

- Help survivor actualize the loss
  - Talk about what happened
- Help survivor identify and express feelings
- Help survivor identify coping strategies
  - Problem-Solving approach
  - Discourage major life changes for a while
- Encourage survivors to continue living their life
- Provide time to grieve
  - Help clients prepare in advance
  - Crucial times include three months after loss, anniversaries and holidays
- Educate clients about the grieving process
  - Helps normalize grief
- Be sensitive to individual differences (Kanel, 2014)

**Grief Counseling**
Defenses and coping styles are assessed
Past issues of loss an abandonment should be addressed
  Counselor should help client grieve previous losses
  Helpful when trying to get through a recent loss
Generally 2-5 year counseling process (Kanel, 2014, p. 140)
Long-term therapy may be necessary for client's whose symptoms appear to be delayed, chronic, exaggerated or masked
  possible underlying pathological disorder (Kanel, 2014)

Traumatic Loss
Traumatic grief is the result of a sudden, unexpected, and/or violent death
  Often more extensive and more challenging to navigate
Client often has difficulty understanding death, feels detached, numbed, bitter, angry, a shattered sense of trust, a damaged sense of safety, and intrusive thinking that preoccupy their life
Traumatic grief often causes a complex, delayed, avoided, and/or chronic grieving process (Comstock, 2005)


Counseling Considerations
  Counselor should consider spiritual and psychological aspects of the client
    Client likely to struggle with past actions, missed opportunities, fear of living with the loss, fear of the afterlife and the meaning of life in general
  Help client adjust to their “new” life, and work towards finding meaning in their loss (Comstock, 2005)

Child Reaction to Loss
Common child expressions of grief: confusion, loneliness sadness
Lose aspects of their innocence
  Realization that life is temporary
  We can lose the people we love and count on (Comstock, 2005)

Counseling Considerations
  Explore facts and beliefs about death
    Helps child work through their fears
  Listening is the most important tool, as children automatically verbalize their pain when given the opportunity
  Help child contrast images through words, pictures and symbols that derive comfort and engrave memories of their loved one (Comstock, 2005)

Adolescent Reaction to Loss
Common adolescent expressions of grief: rage and guilt (two most common reactions), reduced quality of academic performance, rebellious behaviors, ego deficits, low self-esteem, withdrawal and depression.
Adolescents may inherit a new role in the family dynamic
  These responsibilities are often beyond their years, therefore, they also experience losses of childhood (Comstock, 2005)

Counseling Considerations
  Counselor should aim to create a unique form of safety, stability and support for the adolescent client
Positive images about grief and loss should be explored (Comstock, 2005)

The Loss of a Child
According to Kanel (2014), “Losing a child has a different meaning than losing a parent. When you lose a parent, you lose your past, but when you lose a child, you lose your future” (p. 140).
- Common parent expressions of grief: guilt, lack of control, overwhelming anxiety, withdrawal, suicidal ideation and the lack of sleep/appetite (Comstock, 2005)
- Likely to cause a significant amount of tension in marriages
  - Divorce rate of bereaved parents is 92 percent (Kanel, 2014, p. 141)
- Adjusting to life without the child
- Spiritual beliefs are often questioned (Kanel, 2014)

Counseling Considerations
- Minimize talking, and allow parent to express any/all emotions freely
- Structure will not be beneficial; just listen
  - Offer supportive comments
  - Express empathy
  - Educate parents about the nature of grief and it’s process (Kanel, 2014)
- Connect grieving parent to a support group is the best option
  - According to Kanel (2014), “In the group, they can feel whatever is in their hearts and say whatever is on their minds with no fear of ridicule or invalidation” (p. 142).

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems View Related to Grief, Loss, and Death
- Microsystem—For clients: The beliefs of grieving among members of a client’s microsystem, for instance, the nuclear family. Mesosystem—For clients: How do extended family members get along? Exosystem—For clients: The therapist could extend his or her inquiries beyond the extended family to the supporting friends. Macrosystem—For clients: The client could be steered toward grief education. Chronosystem—For clients: Traumatic loss could be attended to.
- How the model impacts development: The grieving person’s and the different communities’ views of grief affect each other (Broderick & Blewitt, 2014)

Cultural/Ethnic Experiences Related to Grief, Loss, and Death
- Losses can occur in many ways, however, the crippling feelings of pain are universal
Cultures such as Nepal and China:
  - Community involvement in rituals of death/dying
  - Grief is expressed openly and without fear of judgement
Cultures such the United States and Britain:
  - Death rituals are extremely private and family based
  - Society discourages public emotional expression; displaying sorrow is a sign of weakness, and makes people uncomfortable
- Families often establish negative patterns for expressing grief that alter connectedness
- Relational-Cultural Theory suggests that although these patterns are natural ways of coping, they facilitate isolation which can be extremely detrimental to the well-being of the survivor (Comstock, 2005)

Spiritual/Religious Experiences Relevant to this Population
Thomas Moore (2005), describes loss as “profoundly unsettling, offering no conceivable way out, except perhaps to rely on pure faith and resources far beyond your understanding and capability. The
dark night calls for a spiritual response, not only a therapeutic one. It pushes you to the edge of what is familiar and reliable, stretching your imagination about how life works and who or what controls it all.”

**James Fowler’s Theory of Spiritual Development Related to Grief, Loss, and Death**

- Six stage model of spiritual development
- Faith defined as a positive feature of human struggle to find and maintain meaning
  - Interactions and life-altering experiences help cultivate faith (Andrade, 2014)

**Model of Faith Development**

- **Stage 1: Intuitive –projective faith**
  - *Survivor confused about their pre-existing beliefs about faith after the loss*
- **Stage 2: Mythical-literal faith**
  - *Survivor becomes curious about the afterlife and longs for the deceased*
- **Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional faith**
  - *Survivor desires a sense of safety and comfort from a higher being*
- **Stage 4: Individualistic-reflective faith**
  - *Survivor acquires a deeper self-awareness and understanding about the nature of life and spirituality*
- **Stage 5: Conjunctive faith**
  - *Survivor comes to grips with many truths, sees the bigger picture, and cultivates ways to contribute to society by sharing his/her painful experience of loss with others*
- **Stage 6: Universalizing faith**
  - *Survivor recognizes their pain as sacred, and uses it to make a difference (counseling)* (Gold, 2010, p. 59)

**Accelerating Spiritual Development**

- Counselors can be trained to work with communities and families to guide rituals that help manage grief. Rituals help grievers regain some control, and are intended to be deeply felt (Cacciatore, 2012).

**Mindfulness**

- Act of being aware, or in the present moment
- Can help cultivate a purposeful life journey
- Grief can be used as a positive tool in transforming the rest of your life (Kumar, 2005)

**Activity: Sara’s healing yoga**

**Piaget’s Cognitive Stages of Development Related to Grief, Loss, and Death**

1. Knowledge is organized
2. Organization is changed over time due to adaptation
3. Adaptation entails fitting new knowledge to existing knowledge structures (assimilation) and changes knowledge structures to fit what is new (accommodation) (Broderick & Blewitt, 2014)

- **Sensorimotor**: Exploration of world through senses – *survivor pretends the pain is not there; the loss isn’t real*
- **Preoperational**: Symbols, words and images; logical reasoning underdeveloped – *Survivor not capable of understanding the reality of the loss*
- **Concrete Operational**: Logical reasoning – *Survivor grapples with the irreversible reality of the loss*
- **Formal Operations**: Abstract thinking – *Survivor realizes that’s death is inevitable, accepts it (although still painful), and honors their pain*
Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development Related to Grief, Loss, and Death

- **Trust vs. Mistrust** (until age 1.5)–“Yes, even babies grieve” (Wolfelt, 2013); Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (age 1.5-3)–Bereaved toddlers mostly need our love and attention; Initiative vs. Guilt (age 3-5)–Model expressions of grief.

  *Activity: Children’s books passed around*

- **Industry vs. Inferiority** (age 5-12)–Offer accurate information; Identity vs. Role Confusion (age 12-18)–Model feelings expressions (Judi’s House, 2016).

  *Activity: Show or play children's grief games*

- **Intimacy vs. Isolation** (age 18-40)–Clear gender differences in sexuality after a loss. Men ready to resume usual activity earlier. Women can perceive sex as somehow wrong (Dyregrov & Gjestad, 2011).

- **Generativity vs. Stagnation** (age 40-65)–Creating, Reframing. Telling others about the loved one (Maercer, Bonanno, Znoj, Horowitz, 1998).

- **Ego Integrity vs. Despair** (age 65+)–Acceptance of ambivalence of life (there is good, bad, and great); expression of philosophical sense of gratitude (Maercer et al., 1998)

- Critique of theory: It can be adopted toward grieving during those ages and stages. I was heartened to find many resources on grieving children.

Gilligan’s Moral Development Theory Related to Grief, Loss, and Death

**Preconventional:** Individual survival – *Don’t be sad in front of others; not socially acceptable*

  **Selfishness to responsibility to others**

**Conventional:** Self-sacrifice for the greater good – *Sharing your story; allowing yourself to be authentic and vulnerable to help others in their mourning*

  **Goodness to truth**

**Postconventional:** Do no harm to oneself or others – *Self-care; allowing others to grieve in their own ways*

Systemic and Individual Resilience Factors

- Dr. George Bonono: Empirical work on resilience in loss (Columbia University, nd). Book, *The Other Side of Sadness*... is peer-reviewed research. Concludes that natural resilience is a component of grief (Teachers College Columbia University, nd).

References


Viorst, J. (1986). *Necessary losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies, and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow*. New York, NY: Fireside.

