The Impact of Grief, Loss, and Death on Individual and Family Development

Jamee Leichtle and Jenny Robbins
Are you sure you want to come?

Yeah, I'm not scared.
Terminology

Loss
Can be physical (death) or social (divorce). Can be any change.

Grief
The normal process of reacting to a loss.

(Fisher Center for Alzheimer’s Research Foundation, 2016)
There are Infinite *Losses* (Beattie, 2006)

- Permanent or long-term illness that impacts quality of life or ability to function (us)
- Permanent or long-term illness that impacts quality of life or ability to function (someone we love)
- Ill spouse/partner who requires temporary caretaking
- Ill spouse/partner who requires long-term caretaking
- Ill family member who requires temporary caretaking
- Ill family member who requires long-term caretaking
- Illness as a child that affected our school or social participation
- Ill child with special needs (our child)
- Debilitating illness in ourselves that requires temporary caretaking
- Debilitating illness in ourselves that requires permanent or
2 Developmental Stages from Our Text

- Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ 5 Stages of Grief
- Judith Viorst’s 3 Stages of Grief and Loss

(Comstock, 2005)
“People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.”

~ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Was a Groundbreaker

Taught an estimated 125,000 students in death and dying courses.

ON DEATH & DYING
What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy & Their Own Families
ELISABETH KÜBLER-ROSS, M.D.
foreword by IRA BYOCK, M.D.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation (2016)
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

- Influential teacher on grief, loss, and death
- A pioneer in near-death studies
- Wrote *On Death and Dying*

5 Stages of Grief and Loss

- 1. Denial
- 2. Bargaining
- 3. Anger
- 4. Despair
- 5. Acceptance

(Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation, 2016)
Adjustment/Maladjustment to Kübler-Ross’ Theory

**Adjustment:**
Through working through the stages one will reach acceptance.

**Maladjustment:**
Some struggle with death to the end.

(Comstock, 2005)

Some go back and revisit former stages several times.

(What’s Your Grief, 2016)
But…

“On Death and Dying was never a study of grief and bereavement. It was a discussion of some key emotional reactions to the experience of the dying.”

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation (2016)
Wrote *Necessary Losses*

“For the need to become a separate self is as urgent as the yearning to merge forever” (Viorst, 1986, p. 43)

An influential book in the grief for generations

(Viorst, 1998)
Judith Viorst’s Stage Theory of Grief:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shock, numbness, denial, disbelief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pain, longing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recover some energy, some hopefulness, some joy. Integration.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Comstock, 2005)
Adjustment
Comes from the integration of the loss

Maladjustment
Maybe the only choice we have is what to do when our loved one dies: to live crippled, or to forge new adaptations from pain and memory.

(Viorst, 1998)
2 Contemporary Developmental Stages

- William Worden’s Four Tasks of Mourning
- Robert Neimeyer’s Constructivist Psychotherapy
Worden's Tasks of Mourning

Task #1
To Accept the Reality of the Loss

Task #2
To Work Through the Pain of Grief

Task #3
To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

Task #4
To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Embarking on a New Life

Adapted from Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy (2nd ed.) by J. William Worden (2009)
http://whatyourgrief.com
Adjustment
Finding an enduring connection.

Maladjustment
A stigmatized death may present challenges

(What’s Your Grief, 2016)
Robert Neimeyer, Constructivist Psychotherapy

Studies how people construct meaning in their lives after loss.

Even the most painful challenges contain possibility.

Distills client’s themes that will lead to a meaningful life.

(Neimeyer, 2016)
Neimeyer’s Adjustment/Maladjustment

Adjustment
Making meaning out of the loss

Maladjustment
Complicated grief may result from violent or primary attachment figure loss

(Neimeyer, 2016)
Good Grief Project Video
With Robert Neimeyer

http://beyondgoodbye.co.uk/?page_id=6126
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), (Wolfelt, 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 & 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 and 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

• 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

(Comstock, 2005)

- 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
- Opportunities, fear of living with the loss, fear of the afterlife and the meaning of life in general
Counselor should consider spiritual and psychological aspects of the client
- Client likely to struggle with past actions, missed

Help client adjust to their “new” life, and work toward finding meaning in their loss

(Comstock, 2005)
Child Reaction to Loss

• Common child expressions of grief: confusion, loneliness sadness

• Lost aspects of their innocence
  ➢ Realization that life is temporary
  ➢ We can lose the people we love and count on

(Comstock, 2005)
Counseling Considerations for Children

- Explore facts and beliefs about death
  - Help 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 encourage 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)
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)

### According to Kanel (2014),

- Likely to cause a significant amount of tension in marriages
  - Divorce rate of bereaved parents is 92% (Kanel, 2014, p. 141)
- Adjusting to life without the child
- Spiritual beliefs are often questioned
## Counseling Considerations for the Loss of a Child

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Minimize talking, and allow parent to express any/all emotions freely</th>
<th>Structure will not be beneficial; just listen</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Offer supportive comments</td>
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<td>Express empathy</td>
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<td>Educate parents about the nature of grief and its process</td>
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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 Model Related to Grief, Loss, and Death
Bronfenbrenner’s Stages

Microsystem: The beliefs of grieving among members of a client’s microsystem.

Mesosystem–How do extended family members get along?

Exosystem–The therapist could extend his or her inquiries beyond the extended family to the supporting friends.

Macrosystem–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.
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 discouraging emotional expression isolates people, which can be extremely detrimental
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 faith 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)
Counselors can guide rituals that help manage grief. Ritual helps 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)
Mindfulness Activity

Yoga for Trauma and Loss
Piaget’s Stages of Development

Related to Grief, Loss, and Death
• **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

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.


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*

**Critique**: *Male vs Female grieving processes*
Systemic and Individual Resilience Factors

Dr. George Bonanno

- 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).

Linda Brooks, RN, BSN, CT

- Daughter died, became grief counselor, active in community, nominated for Amazing Women award.

(Christopher & Banks, 2016)
To Honor What We’ve Learned

About making meaning of our loss, continuing our connections with our sister and our son, working through our grief, and remembering, our presentation is in honor of

Dennielle and Kade
Dennielle and Kade