

Addressing Loss and Grief with People who misuse Substances

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Living with Loss

- The Ocean Metaphor:
 - Loss is part of life, like waves on the ocean
 - What we do with loss is important
- My aim is to help people be confident that they can live *with* their losses, not to put their energies into avoiding their impact by abusing substances.

Loss & Grief & Substance use

- Loss – what is gone or may go
- Types: e.g. anticipatory, cumulative, non-finite, complex.
- Grief – the reactions.....
- Substance use often increases.....
- Normalise grief reactions: people can feel “mad”.

Working with grief

- Ask “what happened?” Listen, clarify, be curious.
- Emotions are often about relationships. Explore this.
- Practice listening to distress to develop confidence.
- Encourage your clients to tell others what they need. They can practice this with you.
- Coping strategies are similar to A&OD

Meaning of the loss

- The meaning of the emotion is important. Don't assume. It is usually about relationships.
- Understand your own issues to prevent assumptions.
-see next

Meaning

Meaning can depend on a variety of things

- The relationship with the ‘lost object’
- What happened – the first question
- What they know about the event
- How they were cared for
- How the loss impacted on them

Writers

- Sigmund Freud - Mourning and melancholia
- John Bowlby - Attachment
- William Worden – Grief Therapy
- Mal McKissock - Coping & self-help
- Phyllis Silvermann - Continuing bonds
- E. Bruce and C. Schultz - Non-finite loss & grief
- Darian Leader - the New Black
- Levenkron – Cutting
- Kenneth Doka – Children & adolescents

Mal McKissock

- healthy to express intense emotions;
- grieving heals the wound of separation;
- Feelings - shock, sadness, anger, guilt, depression, despair, relief, hope, acceptance;
- time will diminish intensity of feelings (if not help may be needed);
- total absence of grief may indicate help is needed;
- lack of grieving can increase physical and psychological illness.

Words

William Shakespeare:

“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the overwrought heart and bids it break” Macbeth 1943

This is the most central and consistent therapeutic task to be accomplished in grieving non-finite loss (Bruce and Schultz Nonfinite loss and grief 2001)

Cases

- The sign on the grass
- Sibling overdose
- Son's death
- Loss of dreams – fire, rescue, burns, addiction
- Disability
- Termination

The end

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