



LOSS & GRIEF IN YOUNG PEOPLE

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Susan De Campo

lifecare@bigpond.com



LOSS ...

- ⦿ **Is:** “being deprived of, or coming to be without something that a person has had - and still wants”.

- ⦿ **Is “produced by an event which is perceived to be negative by the individuals involved and results in long term changes to one’s social situations, relationships, or cognitions”** . Millar & Omarzu (1998)

“COMMON” LOSSES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



- Relationships - intimate, friends, “first one”



- Acceptance - friends, family

- “Traditional” family unit



- Self image/self esteem



Grieving is a normal natural process

- Physical grief reactions

- Neuroendocrine changes/changes in immune system/?inc harmful behaviour/?dec self-care
- Palpitations, sighing, headaches, appetite changes, chills, fatigue, sleep probs, stiff neck, jaw stiffness, hypervigilance, chest pain, gastric probs, aches



- Psychological/emotional responses

- Irritability, anger, frustration, agitation, sadness, numbness, confusion, anxiety, lability, apathy, dreams

- Behavioural Reactions

- Can't concentrate, dysphasia, forgetfulness, social phobia, increase in pain Mx tools, preoccupation with memorabilia, argumentative.





Dealing with loss is a very individual, mostly private and even at times, lonely experience.

What are the implications of this:

In relationships

For those who are all ready isolated



Loss threatens our sense of mastery and control.

- ▶ What is that we draw upon when we feel out of control?

What are the ways that feeling out of control might present?



MATRIX OF LIFE EVENTS

controllable/significant

controllable/insignificant

Uncontrollable/significant

uncontrollable/insignificant

When a person has suffered a traumatic loss the issue of lack of mastery and control dominates our response.
(Janoff-Bulman, 1992, Shattered Assumptions)

Losses rarely exist alone

- Knowing about secondary losses:
 - Assists in giving the big picture
 - May reduce possibility of progression to complicated grief or prolonged mourning
 - Will help us understand “down the track” symptoms
 - Assists with empathy
 - Assists in acknowledgement of “ripple effect” of loss



Factors affecting the process of grieving

- **Cultural issues**
- **Psychological health**
- **Physical health**
- **Nature of loss**
 - **Traumatic**
 - **Disenfranchised (Doka, 1989)**
- **Systemic support – family, friends etc**
- **Modelled coping patterns**
- **Spiritual perspective**
- **Resilience**
- **Meaning of the loss**
- **Age**
- **Gender**



Special considerations for Young People



- Lack of or reduced communication skills – losses more deeply and personally held. Grieving that proceeds without interruption facilitates the process from disorganisation, confusion & fear to integration and adjustment. Being able to trust the support person is critical.
- Loss starts at birth. Sometimes the accumulation of losses will impair emotional growth.
- Children are constantly changing – physically, cognitively and emotionally – “change” ADDS to loss.



10 Questions of Loss & Grief



1. **WHAT HAS BEEN LOST?**
2. **WHAT WAS THE IMPORTANCE/POWER/POSITION OF THE LOSS IN THE LIFE OF THE YOUNG PERSON?**
3. **WHAT ARE THE MAIN SYMPTOMS? WHAT ONES ARE PROBLEMATIC?**
4. **WHERE IS THE YOUNG PERSON IN THEIR JOURNEY?**
5. **WHAT IS THE WORLD OF THE YOUNG PERSON LIKE?**
6. **HOW IS THE YOUNG PERSON MANAGING THE TRANSITION TO FORMER ASSUMPTIVE WORLD TO CURRENT ASSUMPTIVE WORLD?**
7. **WHAT STRENGTHS/RESOURCES DOES THE YOUNG PERSON BRING TO THE EXPERIENCE?**
8. **WHAT HINDRANCES / OBSTACLES ARE THERE?**
9. **HAS GRIEVING BECOME COMPLICATED?**
10. **ARE THERE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG PERSON THAT COULD CHALLENGE YOUR CARE? Smart-mouthed, presentation,**

Practically speaking ...

- What do I do that makes a young person feel safer?
- What do I do that makes a young person feel less safe?



Consider:

- Internal safety: provide opportunity to talk, vent, normalise, continuing bonds.
- Interactional safety: involves facilitating young people to communicate what they need.
- Organisational safety: consider cultural/societal systems that are pro-children rather than pro-adult.





- ◉ Be more aware of *changes* in usual behaviour
- ◉ Know that intense outward behaviour is not *always* indicative of turmoil occurring internally.
- ◉ Grief reactions in young people are fluid
- ◉ The HUGE range of responses and expressions of a young person's needs make recognition challenging.
- ◉ Some behaviours may be part of so-called normal development not to do with loss.
- ◉ The “loss behaviours”/“needs signals” might be a minor extension of existing behaviour and therefore missed.



Self-knowledge is a gift that we can give those experiencing loss and with whose care we may be involved



- Worden (1991) notes the ways in which our own losses can affect our clients:
 1. We can be reminded of our own losses and journey of integration.
 2. Our fears around future losses can be heightened.
 3. Our internalised anxiety around our own death or losses can be heightened.