

Working with Bereavement & Loss

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Introducing myself

- Qualified Counsellor, Psychotherapist & Hypnotherapist
- Almost 20 years in Voluntary, Statutory & Private Sector
- NHS Primary and Secondary Care (Manchester and Cheshire)
- Teach at University of Salford

Objectives

- Reflect on challenges and opportunities for Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners of working with bereaved clients
- Reflect on loss in the context of attachment
- Describe impacts and ways of coping with bereavement
- Use awareness of cultural factors to inform practice
- Be open to subjective experiences of life following bereavement
- Underpin practice with a person-centred approach

Taking care

- Sensitive and emotive topic
- Can affect us deeply and unexpectedly
- We each respond uniquely
- Need to take care of ourselves and each other
- Share your own experience and allow others to choose whether to share theirs
- Introductions and connections

What are the challenges for PWWPs?

- Individually reflect on challenges you have experienced (or could) in working with bereavement – 5 minutes
- Share with the person next to you – 5 minutes each way
- Post-its on the wall

What are the opportunities for PWWs

- Individually reflect on opportunities you have experienced (or could) in working with bereavement – 5 minutes
- Share with the person next to you – 5 minutes each way
- Post-its on the wall

Review PWP challenges & opportunities

- How many are shared, how many are unique?
- Hold in mind during this session
- Please add post-its as we continue the session

Loss happens because we are
attached

Attachment theory

“a way of conceptualising the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression and emotional detachment to which unwilling separation and loss give rise” (Bowlby 2005, p151)

Attachment & connectedness

- “Any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser” (Bowlby, 2005, p154)
- lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (1969, p.194)

Why do we develop attachments?

- Closeness
- Intimacy
- Friendship
- Belonging
- Express love
- Survival

Attachment behaviours

- Intense in childhood
- Frequency and intensity diminishes with age
- Lifelong and invoked by distress, illness and fearful situations
- Includes crying, calling, following, clinging and protest at separation

Attachment features

- **Specificity** – directed toward one or a few individuals in order of preference
- **Duration** – enduring and persistent. Can be supplemented (Eg adolescence)
- **Emotional engagement** – powerful emotion involved in formation, maintenance, disruption and renewal

Attachment features

- **Ontogeny** – develops in first nine months of life, usually to person with most social interaction. Readily activated in first three years of life. Less so thereafter in healthy development
- **Learning** – the familiar in preference to the strange...attachment develops even when attachment figure is cold and punitive

Attachment features

- **Organisation** – becomes increasingly complex as child develops and capacity for representing experience becomes more sophisticated. Activated by hunger, tiredness, strangeness, fear, etc and terminated by sight/sound of mother figure (especially so in happy interaction) Greater intensity of activation requires soothing, cuddling, etc for termination (empathy)

Attachment features

- **Biological** - distinct from feeding and sexual behaviour (thus departing from psychological theories such as Freudian)
- **Adaptively** evolved to ensure survival
- **Universal** – cultural factors influence frequency, but not patterns of attachment

Attachment and loss

“Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another”

(Bowlby, 1969)

Impacts of loss

- Grief and mourning in children (and adults) appear whenever attachment behaviours are activated but the attachment figure remains unavailable
- An inability to form deep relationships with others may result when replacement with a succession of substitutes is too frequent

Responding to bereavement

.....means using our selves
in our encounters

Barriers and enablers to using ourselves in loss encounters

- Group discussion about the value of being personally present with bereaved clients
- What prevents or supports personal presence?

Impacts of bereavement

- Own mortality and that of those we love
- Five Fears of Death
(Doka, 2002)
 - Dying Process
 - After death – judgment – bodily disposition
 - Leaving others behind
 - Particular kind of death
 - Fear of death itself which includes:
 - Loss of mastery
 - Loss of control

Impacts of bereavement

- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Physical
- Behavioural
- Cognitive
- Interpersonal

Share your experiences of working with a client whose loss appeared to manifest in one or more of these ways.

How were you affected?

How did you handle this?

Living with bereavement

Cultural Factors in bereavement

- Different cultural customs, rituals, for dealing with loss that are followed and influenced by one's society

Cultural Factors: Societal & personal influences

- Individual reflection: customs and rituals in bereavement. Spend 5 minutes writing down any words, shapes, images or phrases that you associate with death and dying and how you understand the concept of death
- Talk with the person next to you about how these reflect societal or cultural aspects of your world?
- Group discussion – 15 minutes
- Large group sharing – 10 minutes

The idea of death

- Death affirming cultures
- Death denying cultures

Cultural Factors & Perspectives

- ‘It is precisely because we die that living is so wonderful a gift, whether for a minute or a full lifetime, sick or well, crazed or serene, in pain or delight, no matter, still wonderful’(Malcolm Muggeridge 2007)
- “ though the physicality of death destroys us the idea of death might save us” (Yalom, 2009)

Cultural Context

- We are part of a social context, social beings
- Culture affects how we perceive the world, meanings we attribute to the world and our position within it
- The question how we “see ourselves” , and hence how we “perceive” will have different meanings to western and non western cultures
(Thomson 2012)

Patterns of adjustment following bereavement

Bereavement Processes (Bowlby & Parkes – 4 Phases)

Loss happens when there is “cathexis”: Freud influences: emotional investment , loss/grief→withdrawal of this energy

- **Numbing**: duration varies; automatic pilot/detached; panic attacks
- **Yearning and searching**: starting to acknowledge the loss; feel the void sobbing, extreme distress, insomnia, loss of appetite; disbelief (continual searching) hallucinations; desire to find and re-establish lost attachment; anger and blame (individuals, self, institutions, God, etc)

- **Disorganisation and despair:** experience emotional distress and acknowledge the loss; letting go of previous ways of thinking and interacting; limbo, confusion and uncertainty; concepts of identity, etc
- **Reorganisation:** acceptance of loss; discovering meaning; redefining self identity; learning new skills; orientation toward the future; not detaching but reshaping self-identity

‘if it is necessary for the bereaved person to go through the pain of grief in order to adjust to life without the deceased, then anything which continually allows the bereaved person to avoid or suppress the pain, can only serve to prolong the period of mourning’

Colin Murray Parkes

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross'

influential book '*On Death & Dying*'

- **Denial:** The initial stage: "It can't be happening."
- **Anger:** "Why ME? It's not fair?!" (either referring to God, oneself, or anybody perceived, rightly or wrongly as responsible)
- **Bargaining:** "I know I'll die but if you just let me live to see my son graduate."
- **Depression:** "I am so sad, why bother with anything?"
- **Acceptance:** "It's going to be OK."

Tasks of grieving – Worden's model

- Accepting the reality of the loss
- Experiencing and expressing feelings
- Adjusting to the new situation
- Withdrawing emotional energy from the loss and putting it into a new relationship or situation

Practitioner Self Care

- Taking time between clients
- Sharing your experiences in a safe relationship
- Taking part in creative & restorative activities
- Making time for your own responses to loss
- Respecting & supporting the needs of others

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Thank you for listening

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