

## Coping with Grief and Loss

Okay, so, we are now recording. I am pleased to introduce our guest speaker, Kevin Herbert, a senior Care Manager with Magellan Healthcare and a licensed professional counselor who has dedicated his time and work to teaching individuals and groups how to understand and better care for themselves and others in the midst of grief and loss.

So, without further ado, Kevin, please take it away.

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Welcome, everybody. I am looking forward to speaking with you and sharing information about grief and loss. We will move through, and if you have questions, you can post them in the questionnaire, and we will try to get through as many of those as we can.

Our objectives are to define grief, bereavement and mourning, to describe the experience of grief, and to identify how to care for yourself and others as you grieve.

So, what is grief? You can tell from the word cloud and with the comments so far, many of you have already experienced a loss, or maybe you are dealing with something fresh now, and hope that this will provide some information, perhaps comforts you today, and grief is a normal and natural response to the loss of someone or something that is very important to us.

Grieving is a process that we go through, our emotional and life adjustment following loss. Grief can happen any time. We could be grieving from a recent loss, or you may find occasionally you grieve from a past loss, during experiences or anniversaries of the loss. Mourning is the process of adapting to life after the loss. There are things we do individually, as we discover day-by-day how the loss has affected us.

There are also things that we do, not because of our culture or our background, but perhaps we go to funerals, go to celebrations, or have a some other remembrance through church and community. These are ways we adapt to life after the loss.

So, grief is what we experience, and mourning is what we do. It is not just about sadness, but plotting a new path forward, and finding a new way to live.

Another word is bereavement. This usually means the death of somebody, especially someone close to us. And it literally means to be deprived, to feel like we have lost a part of ourselves when we experience the loss of someone dear to us.

We may also feel anticipatory grief. This is what happens in advance of a pending loss, and helps us to prepare for the loss in some ways.

If we are caring for someone who is sick and dying. Mourning is what we do with our grief. Bereavement, the loss of someone close to us. But we also grieve other kinds of losses beyond just a loved one's passing.

We might grieve the end of a long-term relationship. Maybe the loss of a job or career. Sometimes our health, you know, the changes that happen to us in our lives that steer us in a direction that one door closes and hopefully another one opens. If we lose something valuable to us.

Even the prolonged absence, not knowing, the loss of a dream, the things we see in the future, things we want for ourselves and those we love and the circumstances beyond our control. That could change the availability of that dream to us.

One of my favorite authors and speakers, somebody I trained with and spent some time with, is Dr. Alan Wolfelt. I really like Dr. Wolfelt's personal way of connecting with and finding meaning in the loss, the measure of the loss and grief and the meaning. The two go hand-in-hand.

If we learn to tell our love story, even if it is bittersweet, we are able to integrate what has happened into the life that we are living, so we find new meaning and purpose.

It is important to recognize that grief is unique for each person, even if we are grieving the same loss, how we do that really depends on our personality, our coping style, what kind of support we have available to us.

Also our ideas about grief, communication, and the things that we do to support ourselves and others.

It is also important to remember there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grieving a loss can take a long time. Again, depending on the circumstances, it could be weeks. It could be years.

The intensity of grief in the early days following the loss is inevitably pervasive and intense. So, we can find space in there to do some of the work that will help us move through that grief.

Some common feelings. Sadness, obviously. But, also, one maybe we don't expect. Again, depending on the circumstances, we might feel angry, guilty or shameful. We might feel like somehow we are at fault. There are also some things that come directly from the effect it has on the body, like being uptight, tension, not being able to concentrate or get enough sleep.

Confusion might come from not having all the answers, and not being able to get the information we are looking for. But it can also be from the shift and focus, being tired, fatigued.

There are also physical symptoms, social expressions, and physically you can expect to see changes in appetite. Many people just don't have much of an appetite following a loss.

Also, sleep disturbances. That can be napping, not being able to fall asleep, having nightmares, waking in the night, also body symptoms, headaches and stomach aches. Sighing and yawning. This one surprised me was the amount of yawning I was doing. It wasn't necessarily that I was tired, but it was something else that my body was doing to try to adapt and make sense of this.

Grief can have an impact on relationships, work, well-being. We might find ourselves even detached from people. We might isolate ourselves from social contact, because we don't want to burden others with our sadness, or our complications, or it is just too much, there is too much attention, there is too much going on, and we find ourselves withdrawing.

We might find ourselves behaving in ways that we don't recognize or being a normal thing. Sometimes we even doubt our own sanity. This stuff doesn't make any sense to me. Am I going crazy?

There is also a lot of overlap between grieving a loss, and depression. Depression in a sense is kind of like an emotion. If you think about it, it is a clinical thing we treat, but depression is also a natural thing

that happens that causes us to withdraw, to save our energy, to focus on the things that that matter. And we also find that happens during times of grief.

The main difference between grief and depression is how we feel about ourselves and our situation. When we are grieving, we might think it is terrible. We might think that what has happened is the worst thing that has ever happened to us. But we think of it as "the thing that happened to us." Whereas with depression we see a bigger hit on self esteem, that we are not goodness, hopeless or being punished for something.

So, if the person has self-esteem eroding behaviors, we may be looking at something different and we will look at that.

And maybe spiritually, questioning the purpose of life, the meaning of death. Why do people suffer? Why am I suffering right now? What is the reason for this?

Some myths about grief. Many of us are familiar with the stages of grief, right? This is a wonderful model, but was originally the stages of dying the observation, the loss, to see how people react and respond and adapt with a pending death or illness.

And over time, that model is realized in a variety of different ways, including being transformed through the stages of grief. Ultimately David Kessler and (?) revisited that and wrote an excellent book on the topic.

It is important to know that, one, stages of grief give us the implied sense there is this, then this, this and this, right? But it doesn't really work that way. There are not really stages, per se.

So, they make sure to clarify that the person may not experience all of these stages. A person may not move through things in the right order. You may find yourself going back to different things over again. You may find some anger you had resolved for a time, but then it comes back and you have to deal with it again.

So, it is helpful to think about the tasks and kinds of things we do to make it through.

Another myth that we should get over grief briefly. This is certainly encouraged in our culture, that you are going to get right back to work, that you shake it off or that somehow grief is this thing that can be quickly treated or addressed.

But, again, it is a measure of how much we love. So it isn't easy to just make it go away.

The idea of closure, resolve, or some kind of resolution that the grief is gone. That isn't really how it works. We are changed. We do go on. So, finding a way to do that meaningfully, and finding a way to bring our loved one on that journey with us, even though they are no longer physically present.

The idea, you know, don't talk about grief. Person grieving may feel like -- like I said earlier, don't burden somebody. I am not going to tell my co-workers this, or I am not going to share this grief, and what ends up happening is they don't.

Eventually the tale needs telling. Eventually we do need to talk about it.

So, if you have an opportunity to talk about it with someone, with a loved one, with a friend, a counselor, a coach, a Pastor, I encourage you to embrace those means.

Because, oftentimes you are going to need to tell the story more. Because there are a lot of stories to tell, so the more opportunities you have, the more you should take advantage of that.

So, what about taking care of yourself? Our body tries to take care of itself and adapt through the grief, but we are burning through a lot of glucose. We will see stress formulas kick in, and we will have imbalance over time. And over time, if we are not getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, exercises or continuing about our normal routine, that is when this disruption can take time to adapt.

So, it helps either to be surrounded by people, you know, or signals in the environment that encourage us to take care of ourselves.

And this is important. When we are grieving our loss, there will be days it all goes out the window. There will be days we want to lie down, sleep, and keep the lights off all day. But there will also be days where we have an exquisite insight into the situation and see the things that have not been doing us any good, the things that are the most practical, the things that may have gotten us more into the stressful situation we find ourselves in.

And it is in those moments of clarity that I encourage my clients and the people I work with, to come up with a list, write these things down.

Another good reason to write things down is we tend to forget things. Keep a list, or if you journal, document your experience as something you can return to later on.

Again, it really helps to communicate, to tell your story, to be open about your grief, and then maybe if it is difficult, if there are members of our family who (Fading audio quality) there might be a family myth of how we communicate, or what emotions are appropriate for us to express. So find a person that allows you to talk safely. Or, if necessary, look for professional help.

I talked about holidays a little earlier, and anniversaries, and how sometimes they are full of losses. A couple days of anniversaries can be painful reminder of the loss.

So, some things we can do around the holidays include being prepared. You know, is there anything we can change in our environment? Is there anything we can say to somebody? Is there anything we can do to set some realistic expectations about what is going to happen?

You might be reluctant to go to the party, or have people over. But instead of not doing that at all, we can give ourselves permission to leave early. We can give ourselves permission to go with somebody, or have something that we do to provide a buffer in those situations.

It is important to acknowledge your feelings and, again, allow yourself to grieve. Where is this coming from? Why am I feeling this way after going a year or years of this affecting me.

Sometimes grief waits. Sometimes when you don't get a chance to tell our story.

If we don't get a chance to sort it out in our minds, deal with the loss, it will wait for us.

And maybe our routines have changed. Maybe the person we lost is the boss. They are the ones that pulled this event together, whatever it might be. So, sometimes our roles change.

Sometimes we have to create all new traditions. This isn't just holidays and traditions, but it goes back to how do we mourn? How do we grieve? We find meaning through the things we do. So, creating a

ritual for ourselves. Finding something that we can do to actively honor the one that we love. Sometimes, you know, we will do that on their anniversary, on their birthday or some special occasion. But it is also nice to have, you know, little things that we do each day.

Things that people think about, you know, like signs, something special that happens in their day. It can remind you what a lovely and special thing that you shared.

Some other stuff we can do to take care of ourselves. We might forget to eat or drink, stay hydrated. Find things that comfort you. What sort of activities give you a moment of peace? What sort of activities fill you with joy.

You may not have the full measure of joy that you would have if you hadn't experienced the loss, but the activity itself is an affirmation that life must go on and life is important to us.

And we may have many others that we love and depend on, so we can, even if we are sad and grieving, keep those loving relationships alive.

Try to stay involved in your activities. Sometimes our routines get messed up, especially early in a loss. Adults, we mostly have control over this, but we could be afraid we will lose our job if we don't go back to work, or something will fall by the wayside if we don't take charge of it. We generally get to choose.

The same isn't always the case for children. There may be other people in your life or family who might be sidelined, who might not feel heard. So, anything we can do to make sure they feel the same advice I have given to you, to share that with a child or somebody, let them know it is okay to talk about this, it is okay to wonder, it is okay to find new ways to mourn.

Then, also, if you are a parent or guardian, try to restore the routine. If you are a supervisor even, if employee has lost somebody important to them, you might think, let's change their workload or do something different here. But, really, the fundamental thing to do is just to listen, and to be willing to provide some flexibility, or to look for areas where support might be necessary.

Sometimes people want to work. Sometimes that is what gets them through, and they feel like having something to do, or doing something that matters to them will keep them moving forward. So, whatever we can do to encourage that.

Give yourself permission to cry. You know? Crying is very healing physically, emotionally, spiritual activity. Even if you are dealing with somebody who is, like, I am crying all the time, as I said before, we can learn to trade or dose ourselves in a sense, give ourselves permission to get through a moment, right?

I can do this for an hour knowing I am going to go cry my eyes out, right? I am going to get through this day knowing that I am going to do something that really matters to me and really is going to help me out.

So, you know, it is important to express the emotions that are there, to talk them out, to, you know, understand them, to record it in a way so you can think about it.

Surround yourself with people who love you. Get involved in the activities that occur as a result of the loss. There are no quick fixes, so be careful with alcohol, signs and signatures and medications.

Medications don't always do us good because they encourage us often to feel like there is nothing wrong because we are medicated. And when we have lost someone dear to us, the disconnect is something that, you know, really doesn't sit well with people. So, while I don't discourage people from taking medications, especially if you are already being treated for a condition, again, don't necessarily think of that as the first thing you are going to do when you are experiencing loss.

Ask for help. Early on after a loss, there will be more people offering their help, offering their time. Later on there will be less and less, until eventually, that is really a measure of how close these other people are to the person that you have lost. The further out you go, the sooner they are back to their lives. And even, eventually, there is somebody close to you that has their life to deal with.

So, take the help when it is offered. Ask for help.

And if you are helping somebody else who is grieving, offer the help. Don't just say, hey, any time. Try to find something specific that they need, or something specific that you can help with because the person grieving is probably not going to go out of their way to reach out.

So, if you can find something specific, that can be really helpful.

There are resources for support. As I said before, grief can get complicated. If there has been multiple ungrieved losses, if there are special circumstances to the loss. If the person doesn't have the support that they need, or the family environment is really dysfunctional, it is going to make grieving more difficult. So counseling can be really helpful for that.

There is a lot of support out there, as well. Usually funeral homes will offer some kind of group classes or some kind of support to their members. Hospice organizations will also have, you know, pre-and post-loss, resources available. And the community organizations, a ministry that could send somebody out (Muffled audio quality), give you the space to talk about it.

There are plenty of online resources, as well. You have resources here through Magellan health. You have licensed clinicians on the phone 24 hours-a-day. We are happy to talk with you and give you and give you an idea about next steps.

All right. We made it to the end. I saw that we do have some questions. I think those have been organized in the background.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Yes, Kevin, we do have some questions. So, I will scroll here to the top.

There are multiple comments here. Let's see.

>> MELANIE ORDONEZ: Allonna, sorry to interrupt, but I want to make sure everyone knows before you leave the call, you have your program benefits available. I will put that information in the Q&A Pod so you know how to get to the website where you can get more information on getting a consultation.

Many people have been sharing some really heartbreaking grief and loss you are going through. I want to let you know you are not alone. That is what your program is here for. It is confidential and no cost to you, so please use those benefits. They are available to you. Thank you, Allonna and Kevin.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Sure.

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Thank you, Mel.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: One question we have here, for someone who has lost a spouse, about two years ago. Can you touch on how the family member, the mother lost the spouse, and they want to know how they can support the husband and his spouse, how they can support the mother-in-law and set boundaries?

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Sure. Adult children who have lost one family member, the partner is grieving, and really having a difficult time with it. I mentioned how we react to grief in different ways.

Some of us might feel irritable. Some of us might be restless. You might even be combative, depending on what we are dealing with and the situation. So, you know, if you are caring for someone who is grieving, or dealing with, you know, multiple stressors, it is important, one, to take care of yourself, right?

To set boundaries about what you can and can't help with. You know, do a reflection or assessment of what you have available to get in the way of your time and resources. I think I saw that question earlier. It sounds like they are wanting to provide some kind of help, and knowing they can't be that help all the time. When it comes to the interaction, recognizing what this person is going through is difficult and the anger is not necessarily directed at me and what I am doing. It is an expression of their frustration, it is an expression of their grief.

So, just bringing it back to that. Understand how much you are hurting today, I can spend a little time with you, and let you know, if there is anything I can help with, I will see what I can find to make things easier for you.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Thank you, Kevin. Here is another one. There are several questions coming in about this. Can you talk a little more about anticipatory grief?

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Certainly. So, we get the news, right? The loved one finds out they have a terminal illness, or there is a situation that could potentially lead to death.

A lot of times somebody might want to keep that to themselves, right? Or they don't want it to get out of the family or a small group of people, and that is understandable.

There are also, you know, the feelings that we have following the loss are sometimes present in anticipation of a loss.

So, recognizing that it is going to be stressful. Recognizing that we might have some anxiety about it, that we might get out of our routine. The stages of dying that we talked about earlier: Denial, right? A person might go, yeah, that is the diagnosis, but that is just a statistic. I am going to beat this, or I am going to go to work and this thing will take care of itself. Or I can't think about that right now, I have three kids to feed, right? So, that is denial.

Beyond that, you know, is the anger and the bargaining, the other things that we do to fight with the inevitable.

So, recognizing the connections you have with people. Who are the supports? Who do you love? Who do you want to know certain things.

With anticipatory grief, we have the chance to have unsaid conversations. You are not looking back going, gosh, I wish I had said such-and-such.

So, allowing yourself some vulnerability, and maybe you are not ready to have that conversation, but what is the benefit of doing it now instead of when it is no longer possible?

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Thanks, Kevin. Here is another good one. Someone wanted to know, what suggestions do you have to manage anger, and how you can keep from getting so angry?

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Certainly. Well, it is one of those things where obviously there are situations where, depending on how the person died or what the circumstances were, it can be very frustrating or somebody is taking something away from you. So it is very natural to feel that.

So, number one, recognizing any emotion we have is a valid emotion, and then what do we do with it? How do we temper our emotions, even when they are intense? We think about them in the context of what matters to us. In the context of who you love, in the context of what you want to communicate and what you can do for yourself the.

We might get citrus frustrated because we don't know how to do that. So we need to maintain relationships and not destroy it, so what can we do with anger?

It turns out there are a lot of things you can do. Think about what is the opposite of anger? With that, do you have something genuinely angry about, we may want answers. But maybe there is something that isn't necessarily this other person's fault, but we are just, because of the situation, more comfortable being angry around them, at them or with them, and just recognizing that it is okay to express that, but we also want to think about that relationship and what it takes to present that.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Kevin, would you have any suggestions on how to combat the worry that you are bringing others down or being a burden when you want to talk about your grief?

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Yes. We talked about this idea that in our society a lot of people have this idea of not talking about death, not talking about grief, trying to avoid these things and sweep them under the rug.

What helps us to reconcile grief and heal is to talk about them, right? Now, this is another thing, you can take the people you know and divide it into three groups.

One-third of the people you encounter, they have their own life. They are not connected, and they don't really care about what you are going through enough to be of help to you. They might outright say get out of my way, or they might say, hey, you have a job to do -- whatever it is.

Then there is another group of people who they know you, they care about you,, or they are close to you, but they don't know what to say. They put their foot in their mouth, or they have their own problems, whatever it is. Some people think they are being helpful, but it is awful to say to someone grieving.

And then you have the other group that shows up and listens. They will not try to solve your problem, like you can solve losing somebody important to you, right? They are just going to be present and listen. So, what you can do is spend more time with them. Don't worry so much about the other ones. They have their opinions or they have their problems, or they are going to say something stupid. That is them not understanding what it is like to go through this. Ultimately we are all going to be in this situation.

So, they will know when they know. Sometimes you can say, hey, that was really hurtful, and leave it at that. But, yeah, you have rights. Look for the griever's rights and find that through the website.

>> ALLONNA SCOTT: Well, thank you, Kevin and thank you for your presentation. This is vital information, and wonderful. It has been excellent and informative. We appreciate it. We wish we could get to all the questions, but unfortunately we are out of time.

But we do ask you to remember that, again, what Melanie had expressed earlier is that you do have your EAP program. It is there day or night, 365/24/7. So, please take advantage of using that resource. All of us have daily struggles we need to address and using your EAP can help you in supporting you to live your best life. Okay?

So, with the poll here we have, you can choose to vote very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. And we would love for you to give your feedback and enter your comments there.

Then, lastly, don't forget about the handout so you can review this wonderful information at a later date. If you are in need of a Certificate of Completion, there is a link there where you can fill out the billable form for the certificate. I will go ahead and stop the recording.

>> MELANIE ORDONEZ: Allonna, real quick, I want to let everyone know, if you are using your benefits, if you have someone else in your household that has also been impacted by this loss, they may be eligible to use the benefits, as well.

So, please, I ask all of you. We have gotten so many stories today that I just want to tell every one of you that if you would just call-in and talk with somebody, there is so much help out there and available. It may not just be for you, but it may be for someone within your household, or your dependent, so, please call in and get that information. There is so much out there to help.

Also, the website is great resource, as well. All right. I think we are ready to wrap it up, Allonna?

>>> I think we are. Thank you all for coming out. This concludes the session for today.

>> MELANIE ORDONEZ: Thanks, everyone. Thanks, Kevin.

>> KEVIN HERBERT: Thank you.