

Healing Conversations 2011 – Session Two –11 November 2011

What is This Thing called Grief?

1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words: 2 minutes.

Talking to Grief

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you
like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door
for a crust, for a meatless bone.
I should trust you.

I should coax you
into the house and give you
your own corner,
a worn mat to lie on,
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living
under my porch.
You long for your real place to be readied
before winter comes. You need
your name,
your collar and tag. You need
the right to warn off intruders,
to consider
my house your own
and me your person
and yourself
my own dog.

- Denise Levertov

2. Check-in/Sharing: About 5 minutes each; let's allow time for short interval of silence in between sharing).

- What was difficult for you this week?
- What has helped?

3. Topic: (TOTAL TIME 60 minutes.)

- **What is this thing called Grief?**
- **What is it doing to my life?**
- **How do I make a place for it in my life?**

A. Readings & Questions:

1. “You will lose someone you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. And you come through. It’s like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.”

— **Anne Lamott**

2. “If you hold back on the emotions – if you don’t allow yourself to go all the way through them ... you’re afraid of the pain, you’re afraid of the grief. You’re afraid of the vulnerability that loving entails. But by throwing yourself into these emotions, by allowing yourself to dive in, all the way, over your head even, you experience them fully and completely. You know what pain is. You know what love is. You know what grief is. And only then can you say, “Alright I have experienced that emotion. I recognize that emotion. Now I need to detach from that emotion for a moment.”

-- **Mitch Albom**

Source: Tuesdays with Morrie: an old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson¹- Page 104 by Mitch Albom

3. *The Well of Grief*

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief
turning downward through its black water
to the place we cannot breathe
will never know the source from which we drink,
the secret water, cold and clear,
nor find in the darkness glimmering
the small round coins
thrown by those who wished for something else.

David Whyte,

Source: *Where Many Rivers Meet*

4. Group Reading of Reconciliation of Grief

Questions:

- What were you taught as a child about death? About the process of grieving?
- How is what you learned helpful, or not helpful to you now.
- Is “ritual” important to you on this “journey?” What sorts of things help you during this time?
- Does your community (family, friends, co-workers, church, etc.) support or provide a context for your mourning? If not, what is it that you need?

B. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing: up to 10 minutes.

Invite the group into 5-10 minutes of silence during which time they are asked to reflect on the questions. Participants are invited to use this time for writing and drawing their responses to the questions if they wish. If another question/aspect of the topic comes up for them, they are welcome to respond to that.

C. Sharing: 40 minutes. Each person has about 5 Minutes

*Coaches should invite each person to share their response **as they feel moved, rather than clockwise**. Give each person equal time to share. If there is time after each person has shared, invite people into a more free flowing discussion of the theme. Coaches may need to repeat the questions, direct the conversation back to the questions, or gently ask how something relates to the questions/theme of the meeting.*

4. Check-out: 10 minutes.

**Is there anything anyone said today that particularly moved you? Inspired you?
What will you take with you from today’s session into the week ahead?**

5. Introducing Next Session’s Questions (optional): 2 minutes.

If you are sharing the next week’s topic questions with your group, now is the time to read them aloud and/or hand them out.

**“Everything Shifts Right Here”
(How Have Things Changed in Your Life?)**

6. Closing Words (provided) and Extinguish the Chalice 2 minutes.

7. Blessing

For Lost Friends by John O'Donohue

(from To Bless the Space Between Us)

As twilight makes a rainbow robe
From the concealed colors of day
In order for time to stay alive

Within the dark weight of night,
May we lose no one we love
From the shelter of our hearts.

.
When we love another heart
And allow it to love us,
We journey deep below time
Into that eternal weave
Where nothing unravels.

.
May we have the grace to see
Despite the hurt of rupture,
The searing of anger,
And the empty disappointment,
That whoever we have loved,
Such love can never quench.

.
Though a door may have closed,
Closed between us,
May we be able to view
Our lost friends with eyes
Wise with calming grace;
Forgive them the damage
We were left to inherit;

.
Free ourselves from the chains
Of forlorn resentment;
Bring warmth again to
Where the heart has frozen
In order that beyond the walls
Of our cherished hurt
And chosen distance
We may be able to
Celebrate the gifts they brought,
Learn and grow from the pain,
And prosper into difference,
Wishing them the peace
Where spirit can summon
Beauty from wounded space.

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HANDOUTS: COMMON FEELINGS

HAVE EXTRA COPIES ON HAND OF:

**THE RECONCILIATION OF GRIEF
JOURNEY OF GRIEF DIAGRAM**

THE RECONCILIATION OF GRIEF

WHAT IS GRIEF? WHAT IS MOURNING?

Grief is an internal experience. For some, it is an inside emptiness - a fear - panic - loneliness - anger - guilt - longing - depression. When asked this question at a recent session, someone said, "Grief is Love - with no place to go".

Mourning is a bit different. Mourning is 'grief' which is expressed to the outside world. It is the process where I 'work through' my grief by outwardly expressing my internal feelings.

Grief alone, without mourning, is dangerous and destructive to the human system. By coming to this group, you are beginning or continuing a healthy process of mourning. What are you experiencing now - what is it like for you?

WHEN GROWING UP, WHO TAUGHT US HOW TO MOURN?

All our lives, most of us have been taught how to acquire, not how to lose. There has been no course called LOSS 101. No wonder it is strange and painful. Many mourn their grief as they witnessed some role model, (perhaps a parent, movie or national personality) handle his or her grief.

As young people, we may have heard these messages:

- "Don't feel bad, don't cry." (Message - Bury your feelings)
- "You lost your toy! Well just be good and Santa will bring another." (Message - everything is replaceable)
- "Now! You just keep your feelings to yourself." (Message - Don't trust, it isn't safe to share your feelings.)

Who taught you how to appropriately express feelings and experience loss?

GRIEF RECONCILIATION - WHAT IS IT?

Intellectually, you know you really don't recover from your grief in the sense that everything is restored to the way it was before. You know how unlikely it is that life will ever "be the same", yet at the beginning it is so difficult to accept. You are beginning a process - a process of "reconciliation" where you learn to become more and more adapted to a new and changed, way of living. There are a number of tasks ahead as you proceed with your individual and unique process of reconciliation.

You learn to effectively experience and express outside of yourself, the reality of the death.

You allow yourself to fully embrace the pain of the loss, while learning how to assure that you are nurtured, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

You learn to convert your relationship with the person who died from one of interactive presence to one of appropriate memory.

You learn to develop a new self-identity based on a life without the person who died.

You begin to relate the experience of the death to a context of new meaning in your

life.

You develop a lasting network of support to help you through the process.

Adapted by Alan Taplow from "The Grief Recovery Handbook", by John W. James and Frank Cherry, as well as writings on Reconciliation Needs of the Mourner, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Healing Conversations Session 2

Questions for Reflection: What is this thing called “Grief?”

You are welcome to respond to one, all or any of the questions. If none of these questions speak to your experience, please create your own question and respond to that.

- **What were you taught as a child about death? About the process of grieving?**
- **How is what you learned helpful, or not helpful to you now?**
- **Is “ritual” important to you on this “journey?” What sorts of things help you during this time?**
- **Does your community (family, friends, co-workers, church, etc.) support or provide a context for your mourning? If not, what is it that you need?**