

Lesson 2 Notes

How Can We Help Our Grieving Friends? We watched Megan Devine's short, animated video full of great information. Here are a few more ideas of things we can do to support grievers.

Be mindful. Watch over your people. Support their right to be safe and happy. Listen intently without advice, judgment, or criticism. Protect them and their human rights. Let them know you will not abandon them. Keep your boundaries clear. When you say you will do something, do it!

Listen Deeply. We often talk about deep listening. Think about what it is really. You are listening to the thoughts and feelings of another person while remembering their inherent goodness. If a reaction comes up in you about another situation, put it away for now. Keep your emotional space free and clear. Deep listening is a skill that we must practice so that it becomes second nature in our lives.

Practice Grief Literacy. You've probably heard this phrase before: "When we know better, we do better." Most of us have been raised in an environment that tells us to "be strong", "get over it", "don't worry, be happy." We don't realize how much of our thinking is based on misinformation passed on to us by our family, friends, school, media, or social media. In grief literacy, we understand the issues. We are sensitive and we know how to support our grieving friends.

Be Gentle, Go Slow. When life is changed by death, dying, dementia, disability, or illness, it is important to be gentle and go slow. You want everyone to be as peaceful as possible. This means treating yourself and others with kindness and patience. It may be difficult to ask for help. When we do, it can be surprising how happy people are to help us. We just have to verbalize what we need from them.

Peer-to-Peer Support. Peer support is different from professional care. Peers meet as equals. They may not have a counseling degree or PhD. Peers are connected through lived experience. Sometimes we want to confide in someone who has been through similar experiences. As peers, we are free to share our stories. There are excellent counselors in the world. Sometimes a grief specialist might refer someone to a counselor. Or a mental health counselor might refer someone to a grief specialist. It is important to identify if a situation is out of your scope of practice and you need to make a referral.

Know Your Resources. Be informed about available local and online resources. Be sure you have examined them well enough to know they are culturally sensitive and appropriate for the needs of your people. It is better to let them search for themselves than to make a referral that is problematic.

Beware of Harmful Emotions. When we are dealing with the stress associated with loss, we tend to experience feelings of anger, resentment, envy, and separation. It is important to beware of these emotions, which can cause harm if we cling to them. When they arise, visualize them as a harmful thing and see yourself releasing them to the sky, where they drift like a cloud out of view. When we invest our time and energy into afflictive emotions, we can become physically and emotionally ill.

Be Vigilant. Understanding these ideas can help us to make the world a safer place. Our thoughts lead to actions. When sorrow is repressed, it can turn into anger, which turns into rage. When someone is in a blind rage and untethered, violent acts can ensue, inflicting irreversible damage. When we are vigilant and in communication, we can prevent tragedy from happening.

Shanti Vani's Story of Loss. In the fall of 1977, Shanti was struggling through trauma. She had three young children. A 1978 psychotic break landed her in Westborough State Hospital in Massachusetts, where she spent ten weeks of torment and abuse in the psychiatric system. When she got out of there, Shanti said, "Never again." That period was pivotal in her journey towards helping others. View a 2-minute video of Shanti's Story of Loss: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Rk5b27i4Uc>)

Prolonged Grief Disorder? In 2022, the American Psychiatric Association added a new item to its *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5)*. They call it “Prolonged Grief Disorder”. By its very name, the message is that if griever takes too much time grieving, they are considered to have a psychiatric disorder. The APA website lists eight “symptoms” of supposed PGD and adds the following: “In addition, the person’s bereavement lasts longer than might be expected based on social, cultural, or religious norms.” Let’s talk. (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/prolonged-grief-disorder>)

Naltrexone Drug Trials. People considered to have “Prolonged Grief Disorder” are being conceptualized as having a “disorder of addiction.” The National Institute of Health has been conducting drug trials with Naltrexone, also known as Vivitrol. It is a drug used to treat alcohol and opioid addiction. The hypothesis in this study is that the use of this drug will result in fewer “symptoms” when compared to a placebo. Something to think about is how do these drugs designed to treat physical addiction impact grievers? <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7848251>

A Disease of Perception. This is a phrase used in 12-Step programs. It’s our stinkin’ thinkin’ that gets us in trouble. What we perceive through the lens of our past experiences may not be accurate. It is wise to keep an open mind about people, things, and situations we know little about.

Coping Mechanisms. We develop certain familiar habits to avoid our feelings and to distract ourselves. These include smoking, nail biting, alcohol, drugs, food, social media, video games, sex, exercise, shopping, excessive work, obsessive actions, hoarding, and other behaviors. Being aware of these habits and noticing when we are doing them helps us to be mindful about our feelings.

Creating Safety. Feeling safe is important. How can you be a safe companion or listener for someone in need? What makes you feel safe with another person? What memories do you have of not being safe? What memories do you have of feeling safe? How do you deal with being around unsafe people? How do you feel when you are around safe people? You might want to review The Three Agreements.

Building Trust. How do you build trust? It takes time, patience, and honest communication. Think about this question when you are doing this week’s homework.

“What Is Addiction?” According to Gabor Mate, “The question is not why the addiction? The question is why the pain?” YouTube video by Gabor Mate. <https://drgabormate.com> . Here is a link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5sOh4gKPIg> .

What Not to Say. “At least she’s not suffering anymore. He’s in a better place. You’re still young. You can have another baby. Don’t feel bad. Don’t worry. It’ll be OK. She wouldn’t want you to feel sad.”

What to Say. “I am with you. I hear you. I can’t imagine how you must feel. This is so hard. Do you want to talk about it? It’s ok to say their name. Do you want to tell me about them. I will call you tomorrow.” And when you say you will do something, it is important that you follow through.

Contemplation, Introspection, Meditation. We benefit from times of quiet and solitude. A mindful walk, journaling your thoughts and feelings, or daily reading and meditation are beneficial. Inner work is key to our health and our success.

Create the World You Want to See. When you think about something you wish would happen, turn that wish into action. Find one other person who has the same wish and spend some time together. Make it come true. You have the power to change your world. Sometimes it’s as simple as saying yes and giving people what they want.

This is the end of Lesson 2. Please go to Lesson 2 Homework.