

Lesson 3 Notes

Talking About Death Doesn't Kill You. Talking about death doesn't kill you any more than talking about sex gets you pregnant. It's hard to imagine being dead. But it's true. We are all going to die!

Woody Allen. "I am not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

From AZ Quotes website: (https://www.azquotes.com/author/291-Woody_Allen/tag/death)

Various Human Aspects. Today we are going to address four aspects of our human condition. Physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. We function best when they are aligned. However, in times when someone is out of balance, we can do and say things to help them be more relaxed.

Physical. As care givers, we understand the body's need for rest, sleep, nourishment, cleanliness, touch, and pleasant sensations. With illness comes pain and discomfort. We must accept that certain things are under our control and others are not. We can be mindful of ways we can help.

Cognitive. Sometimes the person we are assisting is not able to think clearly. This can be due to medications, emotional upset, trauma, or dementia. It is important to give care to the best of our ability. Sometimes cognitive changes occur rapidly and sometimes gradually.

Emotional. We have talked about some painful emotions that happen with grief. There is a roller coaster ride of extreme highs and lows. Anger, rage, confusion, despair, and so many feelings run through us, sometimes at a fast pace and sometimes it's like we're stuck in quicksand.

Spiritual. Each person has a unique view of the existential questions. Some believe in past and future lives. Some believe in God and reuniting with their loved ones in heaven. Some fear death and the hell realms. As end-of-life support people, we learn to help allay fears for an easier transition into death.

Parts in Disarray. When we are shaken by trauma and loss, our normal functioning turns into something else. We are in a different mindset. Our nervous system is all over the place. We may zone out or fall asleep at strange times. We may not be able to sleep or rest because we feel like we're going to jump out of our skin. We may think that people are out to get us or that everyone is our enemy. In grief, these kinds of changes are normal and natural. We need support where we are.

What Helps Disjointedness? Remain calm. Improvise. You don't have to figure out how to fix anything. Just listen and acknowledge how hard it is. If it seems appropriate and true, let them know something you have experienced and you found your way through. Tune in, fine tune, and be patient, kind, and trustworthy. We can be available to assist the body, mind, heart, and spirit. We can't do it for them.

Allow All Feelings. Let them know that you would feel the same way if it were happening to you. Anyone would have difficulty in this situation. Let them know it's ok if they cry and it's ok if they don't.

Be in Present Time. There is no time but the present. You may be able to draw the person's attention to something in the environment that catches their interest or attention. Offer a sip of water or tea.

Let Them Be in Pain. You can't take someone else's pain away. You can help them carry it. As Megan Devine says, "It's a radical act to let things hurt." It's astonishing how much validation helps.

Marvel in the Unknown. It's amazing how far and deep just two words can go. Try saying, "I wonder," or "I'm curious," or "What do you think ... ?" Give space for thoughtful interactions and stay close.

I Can't Take Your Pain Away. One time someone was angry at me, and I didn't know why until later. I realized I tried too hard to take their pain away. I thought I could, but I couldn't. It made things worse.

Pain vs. Suffering. Grief in its pure form is a deep, profound experience. Like a beautiful sunset or a rushing waterfall, grief is a force of nature. We suffer when we cling to the past or worry about the future. We're angry at fire for being hot. We resent ice for being cold. Suffering is resisting what is.

Death Education. The sooner we can accept the facts of life and death, the happier we will be as a worldwide community. Death education is very important, and it can happen in many ways.

Nine Death Contemplations. These were given by 11th century Buddhist scholar, Lord Atisha.

1. Death is inevitable. No one is exempt.
2. Our life span is ever decreasing. Each breath brings us closer to death.
3. Death will indeed come, whether or not we are prepared.
4. Human life expectancy is uncertain. Death can come at any time.
5. There are many causes of death – even habits, desires and accidents are precipitants.
6. The human body is fragile and vulnerable. Our life hangs by a single breath.
7. At the time of death, material resources are of no use to us.
8. Our loved ones cannot keep us from death. There is no delaying its advent.
9. Our body cannot help us at the time of death. It too will be lost at that moment.

(<http://allbeingseverywhere.com/the-nine-contemplations-on-death>)

Ritual Traditions. Rituals are intentional actions designed to give meaning and comfort. They can incorporate various aspects into a unique, often improvised activity. Rituals can be created on the fly, according to the unique needs at hand. It can be sharing your story, eating certain foods, lighting a candle, drinking a cup of tea, or talking on the Phone of the Wind with your missing loved one.

Phone of the Wind. Originated in Japan in 2010 and is now used all over the world to converse with loved ones who are no longer here. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhNs_agoJBo)

Nature Mandalas. Creating a mandala from the beauty of nature can calm a weary body and soothe the heart and soul. (<https://www.marymakesgood.com/2020/05/nature-mandalas.html>)

Sacred Fire. When we burn our old bad seeds in a ceremonial fire, it can help us make amends, admit our mistakes, acknowledge what we have done, and let it go. Fire rituals can provide purification.

Self-Love. We must be proactive in loving ourselves. Take some time to review this Self-Love Rainbow with a friend and keep the negative voices from creeping in. (<https://www.selfloverainbow.com>)

Enjoy Nature. There are places to explore. Take some time to enjoy the beauty of the earth, woods, streams, sunshine, exercise and good food. Each day is precious! Let us enjoy the gifts we have.

Love One Another. Notice how good you feel when you help someone else feel happy and enjoy life!

All the Joy ... All the Misery. “All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others. All the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.”
(Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, 1997/2006).

This is the end of Lesson 3. Please go to Lesson 3 Homework.