

Secret and Death

BACP Private Practice Conference 2018

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What does it feel like?



Helen



Paul



Stages of grief & betrayal

- Shock – Paralysis
- Denial – Avoiding
- Anger – Outpour of emotions
- Bargaining – Wanting a way out
- Depression – Realisation that the loss is real
- Testing – Realistic solutions
- Acceptance – Finding the way forward

Common feelings

- Resentment
- Confusion
- Hurt
- Anger
- Feeling betrayed
- Feeling alone
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling unworthy
- Feeling unsupported
- Feeling disgusted
- **Feeling multiple losses: the loss of the person, the loss of the person as was known, the loss of the story**

Grief & Betrayal: Common questions

- Is it ok to feel angry at someone who just died?
- Does grieving mean I will forget or forgive the unforgiveable?
- What was real?
- Did I really know my father/ spouse?
- Can I rely on my memories?
- Did I live a lie?
- Why?
- How did I not see the truth?
- Am I stupid/ naïve for not seeing the truth?

Cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes

- ‘The world is a bad place’
- ‘All men are nasty’
- ‘Nobody can be trusted’
- ‘I don’t want to be part of this world’ (suicidal ideations)
- Drinking heavily and/or taking recreational drugs
- Having frequent sex, and possibly risky sex
- Playing video games all day long.
- Comfort eating excessively or not eating enough.

Disenfranchised grief

- Being denied the chance to **openly** grieve a loss.
- Shame
- Guilt
- Depression
- Anger
- Frustration
- Intense and prolonged sadness

What to do?



Re-framing

- Giving self permission to grieve: no matter what the person has done, he is still a human being who was once around and is no longer.
- Although he has done terrible things and betrayed you, he also had a positive impact on you: your positive memories are still yours.
- It's ok to be angry at someone who died.
- Even though others may say good things about the deceased at the funeral, you are allowed to feel angry. Dying does not negate the trauma he has left behind.
- Grieving does not mean you have to forget what he did.
- Although others may say bad things about him, you are allowed to feel sadness. Dying and betraying does not take away the loss that you are feeling.

Validation

- **Appropriate self-disclosure:** ‘Your mind is a lot like mine’.
- **Thought Hook:** It’s natural to have those thoughts. But If you let them control you, where do they take you? Do they take you away or towards from the life you want?
- **Repeat the thoughts** with the introduction: ‘I’m having the thought that...’ or ‘My mind is telling me that’ Don’t run with it as though the thought was truth!

The Consulting room

- Here, you can grieve properly, with all the messy, confusing emotions and thoughts.
- The space: Time of stillness. Mindfulness. Being with all the emotions non-judgmentally.
- You can leave things here, and not carry them with you everywhere. We will return to those things next week.

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A few suggestions

- Other will have strong and loud opinions. Do not engage in other's opinions. There isn't one right way to feel or think about this. Everybody's process is different. Look after your process.
- Stay away from social media for a while.
- Take time off work.
- Pay attention to your basic self-care: sleep, diet, exercise, etc.

Questions with no answers

- A question is a thought.
- Thought hook. Pros and Cons. What is helpful? What is unhelpful?
- Commitment to self.
- Dual Awareness.
- The truth is not black and white: What are the other feelings that exist next to this big one? What are other thoughts that exist next to this one?

Therapeutic interventions

- **Talking with common sense:** talking to a therapist is talking to someone whose feelings they don't have to manage. The therapist may be the only person that can provide that kind of listening.
- **Chairwork:** very powerful intervention. Talking to the deceased. Or talking to different parts of themselves: the part that loves him and the part that hates him.
- **Letter writing:** raw and unedited material.
- **Visualisation:** 'Back to sender'.
- **Memory box.**
- **Identify a ritual to say goodbye.**

Self-compassion

- Acknowledging, validating and accepting pain
- Defusing self-judgement
- Acting with Kindness
- Connection with others

Making meaning

- **The existential journey:**
- Learning to live with the loss.
- Learning to live without the answers.
- Learning to live with gratitude.

Making a difference

- For some people, the end process of the grief is to do something that makes a difference.
- Helen became a trustee of childhood sexual abuse charity.
- Paul volunteers in a Chemsex service helping other gay men reduce/ stop their Chemsex use.

Therapist's self-care



Connection

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