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THIS CAN **HAPPEN.**

EMPOWERING WORKPLACE
MENTAL HEALTH

Coping with Loss

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With thanks

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Dr Chloe – Expert in Grief, Trauma, Resilience & MH

- Associate Fellow of BPS (British Psychological Society)
- HCPC Registered
- Trauma & Grief Phd
- Years in BBC as OD Consultant and PD Coach
- Author/Researcher/Lecturer
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- 24 years experience in Mental Health in the Workplace
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Objectives of the session

Supporting Staff to:

- Understand Loss in the current context
- Recognize Grief responses
- Support a colleague in Grief
- Remove the fear of talking about Grief
- Use the right language
- Recognize signs of shutting down
- Recognize signs of deteriorating Mental Health



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What is Grief

- Grief is our physical, mental and emotional response to a loss
- Normally this loss is due to the death of a person who matters
- Grief can be experienced with other losses too: e.g. divorce, loss of a home, loss of a pet, loss of health, miscarriage, empty nest, loss of finances, loss of freedom
- Covid-19 has brought with it a multitude of losses



The current context – Mass Grief on many fronts

- Daily routines – WFH, Childcare, Social Care, Care of our elders, School
- Income
- Freedom to make life plans
- Our social networks
- Our health treatments – Cancer and chronic conditions care is on hold
- Freedom to grieve for the lost loved ones in normal ways (e.g No more than 5 people at a funeral)
- We have essentially lost most of our norms and we don't know what the consequences are going to be, how long it is going to go on for and what lies ahead
- The impact on our Mental and Emotional Wellbeing is big

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Impact on Mental Health

- “The Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause you to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely, or frustrated. It is important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently” (March 2020) EVERY MIND MATTERS
- An unprecedented wave of raw Grief, PTSD, Depression, Anxiety is expected

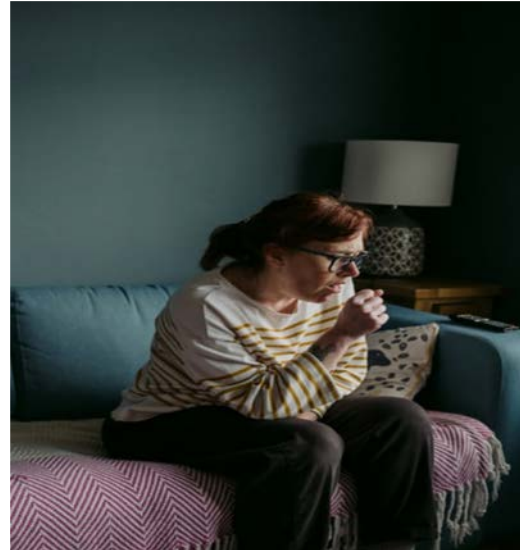


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Higher risk groups

- Under 35s
- Living alone
- Single parents
- Existing Mental Health sufferers
- Coping with Trauma, Abuse or Neglect
- Taking a huge financial hit



Is all Grief the same?

- No there are different types of Grief and here are the most common ones it would be useful for you to know about:
 1. Normal Grief
 2. Delayed Grief
 3. Traumatic also known as Complicated Grief
 4. Chronic Grief
 5. Disenfranchised Grief
 6. Anticipatory Grief





Traumatic & Complicated Grief

- Death by Covid-19 is sudden, aggressive and nothing can be done to prevent it from happening once it has hit the immune system hard
- Normal end of life options, conversations, care and support are not possible – this adds to the trauma
- All of this means Grief will be more intense and potentially more complicated in terms of adapting and recovery
- If not processed adequately, this can lead to MD or PTSD and professional therapy is required

Grief Stages

- All Grief responses are normal
 - Recovery is not in stages
 - No two people experience grief in exactly the same way.
 - Most people go through 7 acts of recovery but these vary and these may not be as applicable if traumatic grief is happening:
1. Initial shock and disbelief
 2. Denial of the truth of the loss
 3. Guilt about unfinished business, things said that can't be unsaid
 4. Anger that the loss has happened and bargaining with God to try and change what has happened
 5. Sadness, loneliness – appreciating that the loss is really happening
 6. Turning point and looking for meaning in your life – Accepting that life can have meaning again
 7. Acceptance – Living past the loss. Integrating it into the new world

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Grief affects the **WHOLE** person

- Relationship with being in a mortal body
- Relationship with one's self
- Relationships with significant others and colleagues
- Values and beliefs about life
- Religion and Spirituality
- Relationship with nature
- Relationship with work



Physical Symptoms of Grief

- It is completely normal to experience physical aspects to Grief and Loss such as:
 - ❑ An empty and hollow feeling in the stomach
 - ❑ Chest pains and/or constricted throat
 - ❑ Headaches and feeling very tired - getting dizzy easily, lightheadedness
 - ❑ Becoming noise intolerant
 - ❑ Having very low energy and lots of aches and pains – actually getting ill
 - ❑ Changes in libido
 - ❑ Shaky hands
 - ❑ Sudden changes in body temp (hot or cold)
 - ❑ Sleeplessness or sleeping too much – Flat line inertia –Checking out
 - ❑ Loss of appetite
 - ❑ Nausea, sick, breathless, crying non stop or at unexpected moments
 - ❑ Not being to concentrate on anything
 - ❑ Memory loss – not remembering what people have said

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Recovery from Physical grief Symptoms involves

- Recognizing the physical aspects of grief, accepting them, reflecting on how to cope with these compassionately, and taking positive action (breaking negative cycles)
- What support do they need to practice good self care physically?



Emotional Grief Symptoms in the current context

- Completely personal and unique
- ❑ Profound traumatic shock at what has happened, the speed of it and the conditions
- ❑ Numb & empty inside
- ❑ Raw & overwhelmed with the crisis and the pain of loss
- ❑ Fear & Anxiety at what now and how much more to bear
- ❑ Deep upset & sadness – especially if premature, sudden, violent death
- ❑ Rage & anger – against virus, against government, against health care systems
- ❑ Helplessness and hopelessness – especially if more than one family member in danger
- ❑ Guilt for surviving – especially if gone through the virus personally
- ❑ Guilt for not being able to arrange normal funeral
- ❑ Despair at not being able to have been there to offer end of life love, care and support
- ❑ Desperate at not being able to be with loved ones to get through this

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Making sense of grief and Loss

When grief occurs we have to work very hard to reconstruct a new kind of reality that feels safe, meaningful and normal. Why has this happened to us?

- I never thought this would happen to me
- I don't feel like I can process this
- I don't think I can cope
- This doesn't seem real
- I am afraid of my feelings – they are too intense
- I don't really understand what is happening to me



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Normalising Grief Responses aids recovery

This means:

1. Recognizing the emotional aspect of grief and loss
2. Accepting it non-judgmentally
3. Seeking support for it
4. Practicing good self care

All grief responses are normal. It is the situation that is abnormal.



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Grief is Personal

- Acknowledging that loss and grief impacts everybody personally is important
- Often people in grief report feeling unfamiliar in themselves, feeling lost and very often becoming critical of themselves, of how they are handling their grief and what their coping strategies are.
- Especially high achievers and many professionals who return to work find that they can't be as driven or as consistent as they used to be and this can cause them to become very self critical and confused about who they are.



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We become what we think

We have **the choice to find meaning** in any experience that life throws at us, even in the face of the most distressing and disrupting events

1. How do I want to be through this?
2. How will I imbue my life with purpose and meaning now?
3. What can I learn from this suffering and loss?
4. How can I bear this with dignity, courage?
5. What support do I need?
6. How will I look after myself through this?



Grief recovery lessons

In grief, the human spirit can grow wiser, stronger and more determined to live a life that feels meaningful and fulfilling. Grief can lead to growth when we:

1. Recognize our responses as grief
2. Express our emotions and thoughts to ourselves and to significant others
3. When we seek support and adjust our expectations of life
4. When we take it one day at a time in self compassion
5. When we learn to accept the loss and find our way to stay connected to what or whom we have lost
6. When we learn to reconstruct meaning in life through connections and life projects.

What conditions create Mental Illness from Grief?

- Avoiding feelings of grief completely
- Shutting down and isolating oneself for prolonged periods (eg more than 2 weeks)
- Acting out – drinking excessively, gambling, becoming unpredictable, making major life decisions unexpectedly, spending too much, not eating, not sleeping or sleeping too much, avoiding work, avoiding support, partying, taking drugs, becoming promiscuous, over medicating to numb out
- Self criticism, judgment
- Not sharing the pain of the loss with anyone
- Feeling like life is without purpose and meaning
- Not seeking professional support



Major Depression – Signs

If a loss is not properly psychologically processed, then the sufferer may develop symptoms of Major Depression. These are:

1. Not wanting to engage with life and significant others.
2. Very low, hopeless mood “can’t control this.”
3. Irritable, intensely negative outlook and internalized angst.
4. Avoiding daily routines and feeling numb or down all the time.
5. At worst, experiencing suicidal ideation and feeling blocked from engaging with life meaningfully or positively.
6. Dropping out of work and shutting life down generally.

Anti-depressants and Therapy (required)

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Remove the fear of Grief

- When supporting a colleague in Grief it is important to learn how to talk about it and remove your fear about it.
- All of us are human and it is normal to experience negative emotions in the face of such loss.
- There is a conspiracy of silence in the workplace when it comes to Grief.
- Don't try and offer reassurance or say likes like:
 - "You will get over it"
 - "Everything will be ok"
 - "You are young, you'll find someone else"
 - "I know exactly how you feel"
- Remember it is not about you





Acknowledge - Reach out – Listen

- Being present is a big deal
- Acknowledging the loss without making demands is the best a colleague or a manager can do.
- The griever takes the lead.
- Avoid the compulsion to “fix”.
- Vital that you reach out, handle the loss with care and manage the boundary between griever and work.
- A phone call, email or text to show consideration and support to a bereaved colleague goes a long way.
- If a manager a Skype or Zoom chat may be appropriate to show that they are valued by the organization.



Support – Reassure – Ask

Ask how you can support them during this time

Inform them and clarify any questions they may have about bereavement policy

When life is in chaos, work can be a life raft and a familiar structure

Reassure them that the team will be happy to “see them” when they are ready to come back

Send flowers or a personal note

Ask them what they would like to do to honor the deceased and if it would be appropriate for their colleagues to participate

Be human – Empower them

Ask the bereaved important questions such as:

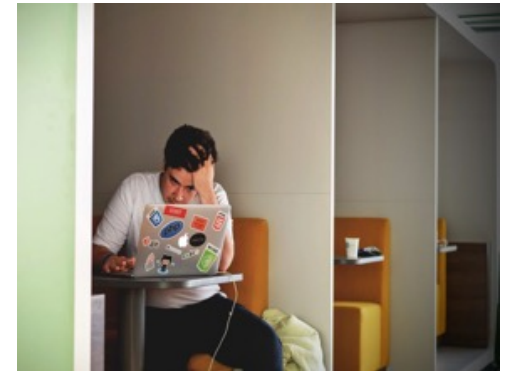
1. How would you like your colleagues to respond?
2. Would you like to join work sessions for an hour or two so the return is not too much too soon?
3. Would it be helpful to work half time for a while to settle back in gradually?

Empower grieving employees to choose and respect their choices

If they are not sure – give them time

Patience – No Judgment – Check in

- Be patient – grief takes time (months and months)
- Even when a good return to work has been handled sensitively, you can't assume that everything will go back to business as usual
- The bereaved will still be in the grip of intense grief
- Often workers can seem inconsistent
- Check in with them regularly





Recognize The bereaved is going through transformation

- When going through grief, the bereaved often wants to just go back to being them
- This is impossible. The reconstructing of oneself is exhausting and destabilizes focus, consistency and drive
- A manager or colleagues must not translate this into loss of talent or interest in work. Recognition and managing of these behaviors can prevent misunderstanding and conflict

Adjust – Flexibility – Empathy

- Often people in grief are very self-critical and want their managers and teams to believe in them whilst not putting too much pressure on them
- With our bereaved colleagues we can give them permission to be both a functioning team member and an incredibly sad, grief stricken human being
- Adjusting expectation is important and will be a relief for the bereaved
- Being flexible is key

Some Do's

- Offer empathy only if you can bear to hold and be with them in raw emotions.
- Reach out to them on the phone or digitally
- Don't engage them publicly – eg not during a group online meeting
- Let them know you hold them in your thoughts and are here if they want to talk.
- Listen unconditionally, non judgmentally
- If it is the first time you are connecting with them try and gauge where they're at

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Some more Do's

- Send them an email welcoming them back and letting them know you are thinking of them
- Ask them what support they would like and how they want you to address their loss with the team
- Check in with them every couple of weeks – here when you need me, thinking of you
- Empathically stand alongside them in whatever way you feel is right



Don't

- Ask them how they are or how they're feeling or what happened – unless they have agreed to have such questions beforehand. These kinds of questions trigger emotions and the bereaved may not want to have to deal with these
- Don't compare or offer optimistic solutions (eg time heals, or you will meet someone else, or try again, or when this happened to me I.....)
- Don't rush to offer condolences – give them time when first back at work
- Don't track their progress and make assumptions
- Don't think of this as one and done. Grief takes time
- Don't ignore them
- Don't judge – all grief is personal
- Don't be frightened to be supportive, or to mention the deceased



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Grief can lead to positives

- Good support through grief builds company loyalty, promotes humane and meaningful work connections
- Everyone feels safe and connected
- There is huge energy that comes from surviving and navigating a difficult grief
- People can become wiser, more self accepting and more resilient through grief



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Taking Personal Responsibility for Recovery

Recovery is aided when self care is prioritised:

MH apps such: Unmind, Headspace, Calm, Big Health, Be Mindful

Bereavement Support – www.cruse.org.uk

The Samaritans – www.samaritans.org.uk

British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy for list of professionals – www.bacp.org

The Counselling Directory for Counselling Professionals – www.counselling-directory.org.uk

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Join us for our next webinar
on 1st May at 11.30am

Managing Mental Health During
These Challenging Times

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