Skills for Living with Loss

Emily McNeil
eemcp6@mail.umsl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://irl.umsl.edu/urs
Part of the Counseling Psychology Commons, Geropsychology Commons, and the Health Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://irl.umsl.edu/urs/60

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Undergraduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Symposium by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact marvinh@umsl.edu.
Skills for Living with Loss

Emily McNeil, B.S.
May 2020, University of Missouri - St. Louis
Rater, Washington University School of Medicine
BACKGROUND ON GRIEF

• Normative but highly life changing

• By 65: One half of all women and 10% of all men experience loss of spouse (Neimeyer & Holland, 2015)

• Most older adults are resilient following the death of a loved one
Trajectories of Grief


The graph illustrates the trajectory of depression and resilience over time. Key points include:

- **Baseline**
- **6 Months After the Loss**
- **18 Months After the Loss**
- **48 Months After the Loss**

**Depression**
- Depression Improved (10.1%)
- Chronic Depression (14.5%)
- Chronic Grief (9.1%)

**Resilience**
- Resilience (66.3%)
STEREOTYPES AND MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF PROCESS

• Grief happens in stages (Kübler-Ross, 1969)
  – Denial, Anger, Protest, Depression, Acceptance, Recovery

• Recent research questions the legitimacy of these stages
  – Acceptance occurs early on
  – No clear separation of emotional phases over time (Holland & Neimeyer, 2010)

• Grief Work Hypothesis (Freud, 1957)
  – Belief that grieving includes working through painful emotions to let go of attachment
CURRENT GRIEF THEORIES

• More recent theories take into account the individuality of bereavement
• Specify the variety of ways in which people cope
• Examples:
  – Models based off individual’s personal values and strengths
**INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

- Traditionally, grief counseling was thought to be simple.
- However, losses can be complicated and complex.
- The traditional models were unable to extend and include interventions for those who were experiencing more complex losses.
- Newer intervention strategies work towards treating complicated bereavement in ways they can use later in life as well.
- Examples: Behavioral Activation and Emotional Regulation.
• 2nd edition involved turning traditional therapy protocol into accessible handouts
• Fall 2019 - UMSL Health & Aging lab, I assisted with the revision of “Living with Loss” module
• I specifically worked on sections involving:
  – Loss of Home
  – Loss of Pets
  – Self-care
Coping with the Loss of My Home

Date(s): ________________

I can ask a family member or friend for support as I practice coping skills.

Situations this week when I missed my home the most:
1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________

Positive Coping Behaviors:
- I took care of my physical health (meals, sleep, exercise, etc.).
- I engaged in a positive, rewarding, or meaningful activity.
- Other:________________________

Honoring My Home:
- I looked at pictures of my home.
- I thought about the special memories I created at my home.
- I talked to others about my home or my feelings.
- Other:________________________

Keeping Contact with My Home:
- I asked a friend or family member to visit my home for me.
- I visited my home.
- Other:________________________

Positive Coping Statements – I reminded myself that:
- This home will always have a place in my heart.
- I looked after my home the best I could.
- Other:________________________

Overall, how effective were these in helping me cope?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not effective</td>
<td>Somewhat effective</td>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXAMPLES OF WORKBOOK PAGES
Personalized Skills for Living with Loss: Loss 7 Practice

Coping with the Loss of My Pet

Date(s): __________

I can ask a family member or friend for support as I practice coping skills.

Situations this week when I missed my pet the most:
1. _____________________________________________
2. _____________________________________________

Positive Coping Behaviors:
☐ I took care of my physical health (meals, sleep, exercise, etc.).
☐ I engaged in a positive, rewarding, or meaningful activity.
☐ Other: _______________________________________

Honor or Valuing My Pet:
☐ I thought about my first time with my pet.
☐ I talked to others about my pet or my feelings.
☐ Other: _______________________________________

Contact with Other Animals:
☐ I asked a friend or family member to bring their pet over.
☐ I volunteered or visited a pet shelter.
☐ Other: _______________________________________

Positive Coping Statements:
☐ I reminded myself that I am grateful for the time I had with my pet.
☐ I reminded myself that I did the best I could when caring for them.
☐ Other: _______________________________________

What I learned about coping with my grief this week.

__________________________________________

EXAMPLES OF WORKBOOK PAGES
Personalized Skills for Living with Loss: Loss 2 Practice

My Self-Care This Week

Date(s): __________

"Self-Care" refers to a range of behaviors and habits linked to my physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Even as I grieve, I can engage in self-care activities that promote my health and wellness.

I can circle each day I did one of these activities to take care of myself. I can ask a family member or friend for support as I practice these skills.

Over this past week, did I:

Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Engage in some physical activity
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Eat healthy meals and snacks
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Get at least 6 hours of sleep
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Take my medication properly
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Have contact with nature in some way
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Participate in a soothing activity
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Have contact with a person or animal who helps me feel cared for
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Do an activity that I have valued in the past
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Engage in a spiritual or religious activity
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Another area of wellness:

What I learned this week about taking care of myself while I grieve:
I can circle each day I did one of these activities to take care of myself. I can ask a family member or friend for support as I practice these skills.

Over this past week, did I:

Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Engage in some physical activity
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Eat healthy meals and snacks
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Get at least 6 hours of sleep
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Take my medication properly
Sun Mon Tue Wed Th F Sat  Have contact with nature in some way
REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE

• Not everyone who experiences a loss needs grief counseling
  – Can do more harm than good
• Debunked the myths and beliefs I had surrounding grief and loss of a loved one
  – I held many of the traditional beliefs regarding grief
REFERENCES


THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?