SEPTEMBER IS THE NEW NOVEMBER: CONSEQUENCES OF COVID'S SHATTERING OF OUR ASSUMPTIVE WORLD

Susan De Campo: PACFA webinar, September 28, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We gather today in this special place to continue our learning journey together.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet.

We pay our respects to the Elders of the past, present and future and acknowledge their spiritual connection to Country.



Loss: What are we talking about?

Loss is produced by an event which is perceived to be negative by the individuals involved and results in longterm changes to one's social situations, relationships, or cognitions.(Miller and Omarzu, 1998)

Is "being deprived of, or coming to be without something that a person has had – and still wants" (dictionary def)

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- A psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience. Trauma often involves a sense of fear, terror and helplessness..... Trauma is an experience that induces an abnormally intense and prolonged stress response." (Perry, 2006)
- <u>Types of Trauma</u> (O'Hanlon, 2010)
- Simple:
- This type of trauma is usually caused by a single incident. The incident is usually one that involves life threatening events and/or events that are have the potential to cause serious injury. (eg, car accident, fire, floods, shooting)
- Complex:
- This type of trauma usually longer in duration and involves multiple incidents. The incidents are usually ones that involve interpersonal violence or violation and as a result are almost always associated with a sense of shame and stigma.(eg, child abuse, DV, war, prison)
- Where would you place COVID-19? Does it depend on HOW you have been affected by the virus.

COVID 19

- COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new form of coronavirus.
- There is no specific treatment or cure for coronaviruses. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses.
- There is no vaccination for COVID-19
- COVID-19 is a pandemic: the worldwide spread of a new disease.
- As well as being a pandemic, COVID-19 could be considered a "natural disaster".

Together then ...

 A natural disaster (such as COVID-19) is a traumatic loss to the extent that we are exposed (directly or indirectly) to a distressing and threatening event, outside our usual range of human experience. We feel hopeless and helpless. We know that our livelihood, social situation, relationships, feelings and thoughts are effected – and have been for some months now. (WHO)

DEFINING "THE LOSS" ...

ASSUMPTIVE WORLD

- "a strongly held set of assumptions about the world and the self which is confidently maintained and used as a means of recognizing, planning, and acting" (Parkes, 1975).
- "the assumptions or beliefs that ground, secure, stabilize and orient people ... our core beliefs" (Beder,2004)
- Janoff-Bulman (1992) Shattered Assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma.
 - The world is benevolent and the people in it are benevolent
 - The world is meaningful life makes sense
 - The self is worthy
- World Assumptions Scale

LOSING OUR ASSUMPTIVE WORLD HAS RESULTED IN OTHER LOSSES/CHANGES.

- Loss of employment
 - Loss of income
 - Loss of status
 - Loss of ability to provide
- Travel/transportation
- Greetings
- Where/how we work
- Our "soft place to fall"
- How/where we shop
- What we're buying
- Education

- How we socialise
- How we exercise
- Hygiene practices
- How we have weddings, funerals, year 12 formals, other gatherings (sporting events, church)
- Loss of "normal conversation"
- Loss of no having to think when you go grocery shopping
- Loss of ability to plan
- Economic & political changes
- "Gender" roles

Grieving is an expected process

(Murray, 2016)

- Physical grief reactions
 - Neuroendocrine changes
 - Palpitations, sighing, headaches, appetite changes, chills, fatigue, sleep probs, stiff neck, jaw stiffness, hypervigilance, chest pain, gastric probs, aches
- Psychological/emotional responses
 - Irritability, anger, frustration, agitation, sadness, numbness, confusion, anxiety, lability, apathy, loss of libido, dreams
- Behavioural Reactions
 - Can't concentrate, dysphasia, forgetfulness, social phobia, increase in "pain Mx tools", preoccupation with memorabilia/how we USED to do life, argumentative.

END OF YEAR FATIGUE SYNDROME

- Boredom
- Lack of sleep
- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Generalised aching
- Poor concentration and memory
- Anxiety
- Depression





https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0X61vZgIM4

Loss experiences impact the conscious and subconscious mind at the earliest age ...

- Lack of or reduced communication skills losses more deeply and personally held.
- Children are constantly changing physically, cognitively and emotionally – "change" ADDS to loss.

(Murray, 2016)

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



- * Be more aware of *changes* in usual behaviour
- * Know that intense outward behaviour is not always indicative of turmoil occurring internally.
- * Grief reactions in young people are fluid
 - Some behaviours may be part of socalled normal development <u>not</u> to do with loss.
 - Maintain routine as much as possible
- * Maintain "boundary setting" as much as possible.

Dealing with loss is an ed block block as a present horse . individual, often private and sometimes, lonely experience.

(Murray, 2016)

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Loss threatens our sense of mastery & control

controllable

important



Matrix of Life Events

controllable

unimportant



uncontrollable unimportant

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Factors affecting the process of integration

- Cultural issues
- Psychological health
- Physical health
- Nature of loss
 - Traumatic
 - Disenfranchised (Doka, 1989)
- Systemic support family, friends etc
- Modelled coping patterns
- Spiritual perspective
- Resilience
- Meaning of the loss
- Age
- Gender

Gender: Some valid generalisations (Martin & Doka, 2000)



- Feminine way interaction with intimate others, expressing emotions verbally, talking about the past, emoting freely. 7% more activity in Limbic centre of brain during bereavement/grief.
- Masculine way talking not a safe thing to do, tendency to connect with grief through action (rather than interaction), preference to heal by changing the future rather than talking about the past, fewer words make grief less visible.
- In relationships how it was BEFORE the trauma will effect how it is AFTER.

Possible outcomes of Traumatic loss

(Boelen, Olff, Smid, 2019)

- Integration of experience into new assumptive world. Oscillation between distress & resilience.
- PTSD
- Development of other mental illness eg, depression, anti-social PD, anxiety disorder, addictions
- Prolonged grief disorder
- Delayed grief
- Vicarious traumatisation
- Death anxiety

Death Anxiety – Staring at the Sun – Yalom, 2008

Our journey with death:

- Children at an early age become aware of mortality dead leaves, insects, pets, elderly relatives. Observe and follow adult carer's lead in response. No significant rumination until adolescence.
- Death anxiety erupts and become a preoccupation. "Many adolescents today may respond to death anxiety by becoming masters and dispensers of death in their second life in violent video games. Others defy death with gallows humour and death-taunting songs, or by watching horror films with friends ... and risk-taking behaviour". (p. 4)
- Re-emerges at critical mortality junctures: death of each generation until you are the oldest living relative, retirement, significant illness, death of peers.
- Are we seeing more death anxiety?

WHAT DOES YALOM SUGGEST WE DO WITH DEATH ANXIETY? (YALOM, 2008)

- How would you usually work with existential issues?
- Existentialism purports that our struggles arise from
 - Our biological genetic substate (a psychopharmacological model)
 - Our struggle with repressed instinctual strivings (Freudian)
 - Our internalised significant adults who could be uncaring, unloving etc (object relations position)
 - Disordered thinking (CBT)
 - Trauma induced altered neuronal pathways (neuroscience)
 - A CONFRONTATION OF OUR EXISTANCE:
 - Death
 - Isolation
 - Meaning of life
 - Freedom

HOW IS "THE WORK" DONE?

Working with the "givens" of existence from an existential therapist's lens:

- Distinguish between content (topics and issues) and process (the relationship).
- It is the relationship that heals.
- "Genuineness" is critically important when DA is apparent.
- Use of immediacy ...
 - The therapy situation is a social microcosm ... sooner or later clients will exhibit, in therapy, the same behaviour that occurs in life outside. One who is self-effacing, arrogant, fearful, seductive, demanding, will, eventually, show the same behaviour to the therapist ... a therapist can use immediacy to focus on the client's role in the creation of the problematic issue occurring in the therapy relationship ... this can be the first step in self-responsibility ... if you can identify your part in what is not working, you can choose to do something about it.

Post-Traumatic Growth (Joseph & Linley, 2008)

- Improved community connectedness Improved preparedness for future
- Improved view of own circumstances and of own abilities
- Meaning making:
 - What will the new normal be?



• We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we had normalised greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature". Sonya Renee Taylor

What about hope?

- Zilberfin & Hurwitz (2003) define hope as "the expectation of good in the future".
- The realisation of hope will not be hurried because we wish it so.
- Surviving a shattered world requires rebuilding, and hope, and patience and tolerance, and understanding, over and over and over.

However we respond, Whatever we do, focus on ...

RESPECT UNDERSTANDING EMPOWERMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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To Listen ...

Listening is not just etiquette (or our job). It is a way of loving, honouring and respecting. It's a way of bonding and connecting. It's a way of sharing ourselves and our humanity.

Listen with *compassion, understanding* and *intention*. Be *patient* and *authentic*.