

Capstone Essay

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LFCH 560 Grief and Loss Coaching

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In module one, Understanding the Basics of Grief, I was drawn to the lecture of Grief, Loss, and Complicated Grief by Eric Scalise, Ph.D. because I have experienced complicated grief. There was so much about this type of grief that I wasn't aware of. I knew it wasn't normal but had not realized how close it resembled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as the griever was prone to survivor guilt, extreme agitation, depressive episodes, suicidal ideation, intense sensitivity to normal things, and intrusive thoughts. I was very interested in the understanding that people with good coping skills could still have major problems with grief. I identified so well with the idea that this type of grief can be connected to the relationship with the person. My husband was my rock and his sudden death almost destroyed me. I went through so many of the symptoms as I battled depression, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, the inability to think clearly enough to attend to daily activities, and extreme isolation. At the time, I didn't realize the depth of these symptoms because they became my normal. It took five years to work this through and begin to get back on my feet.

The things that contribute to complicated grief, such as the loss being incomprehensible, the loss being very untimely, a sense of survival guilt, a culture that does not allow grieving, excessive attachment to the deceased possessions, and resuming normal activities without allowing oneself to grieve hit me on several planes.

This lecture has given me a light to shine on complicated grief and a knowledge of symptoms to look for in a griever that would signal this. As a coach, to a complicated griever, I would want to surround us both in prayer as I ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to help this hurting person. I feel the best place to start with this person is at the beginning by listening, asking questions to bring out what the griever is feeling, and to do so in a manner that brings an attitude of understanding, acceptance, and strength. Going through complicated grief is more than the physical and emotional loss of a person, it is the loss of self. It is an inability to conceive of anything more than the pain, it is the panic of insecurity that surrounds this loss, the inability to see past it or to trust that it will ever be different. A complicated griever is in need of a strong person to come along side, take that person's hand, and give the griever encouragement and hope for a future. It is guiding this griever through the dark tunnel of grief one prayer at a time and one step at a time.

However, as a coach, I also have to look at this person through the eyes of assessment and by so doing make sure the griever is in a place that is appropriate for me to help. Complicated grieving is hard and sometimes needs more help than a coach can give. It is my job to guide this griever to a counselor if I feel there is a problem I am not trained to care for.

Module two, The Power of Loss, was a difficult one for me as a former child with loss issues and as a mom with loss in my own children's lives. The first lecture, Grief and Loss in Childhood by Norm Wright, M.A., MRE, was so full of wonderful insight in dealing with children but the most impactful to me was the knowledge of how to respond to death and how to

deal with it afterward. Mr. Wright's simple explanation of death, "the body does not work anymore," was wonderful, and he also warned us not to use trite phrases. Children respond best to simple and straightforward answers and will ask the same question over and over so be prepared to give simple reassuring answers.

I liked that attending the funeral was placed as a need for children as this is a way to learn about dying and death and a time to teach about different types of mourning. How much information to tell a child was also discussed with age, relationship of the deceased to the child, need to know, and ability to understand being paramount but the truth should always be told.

Children are not adults and it was stressed that their needs after a death will be different. The death may be one that is overwhelming so, we as adults, must try to manage the level of change in the child's life and bring some form of constancy back into it. We need to encourage play and through that encourage emotions to be vented and help the child understand that it is okay to feel sad. We need to give the child a sense of control by returning to family chores, giving them playtime, teaching them that life will now be different and that different can be okay. Most of all, we need to be there not only physically but emotionally in day to day activities but even more in time of prayer.

As a coach, I would make every effort to incorporate the above information into any session I would have with a child. Reaching out to a hurting child and, in time, seeing that child begin to heal would be the most rewarding accomplishment.

Module three, The Unrecognized Effects of Loss: from Individual to Community, gave me an insight into both individual and community loss I had not thought of before. The second lecture, The Impact of Disaster on Individuals, Families. And Communities by George Everly, Ph.D. was enlightening, and I particularly liked the information regarding the subsyndromal impact on individuals. Recognizing that cognitive impairments, emotional, behavioral, physiological, and spiritual/religious reactions can be relatively severe and, yet, not diagnosable gave me a lot to think about when coaching. As I listened, I found it insightful yet not particularly surprising that the impact on spiritual/religious matters was much more difficult to come to grips with than the other four.

As a coach, dealing with the above issues, I would be compelled to ask gentle probing questions to draw out as much information as possible .Realizing that some of the symptoms will abate over time and that coaching would be enough to take them forward, I would also know that in this particular place and time, in the client's, healing I would have to make a strong assessment of what I was seeing and hearing to know if this person was just stuck in the grieving process or actually in need of more help than I was trained for.

Module four, Using Faith and Experiential Techniques to Help Grief, gave me much usable information but I especially enjoyed the lecture, Experiential Techniques for Grief Coaching by Jennifer Cisney, M.A., as she spoke about types of grief styles.

As an RN, I have seen so much grief and responses to it over the years. I have watched as some family members went to the corner of the hospital room and wept silently, if at all, while others screamed and threw themselves over the loved one and sobbed. I have watched as the mourning process was influenced by family dynamics, culture, and faith. This lecture on grief styles gave me a way to look at all these different grief styles I have observed and be able to understand them better. I am able to look back and identify the instrumental griever who did not want to talk but was active in taking care of the business at hand and was challenged on why he was not grieving visually and the intuitive griever who could not begin to make sense of anything because tears were everywhere met with the blended griever who understood and reached out to both.

The grief styles gave me a place to meet the client in a way that would respond to the individual griever. Knowing the differences in the three styles and the way each adapts to grief allows me to lead that person forward as it will be possible to help this person understand what kind of griever they are, why they are feeling as they do and how to overcome and move on.

In module five, Faith Through the Darkness, I chose the lecture, Collateral Damage: Firestorms of Faith by Ken Nichols, Psy.D. who gave four principles to use during this time. My favorite was the second principle, dealing with being patient in the recovery process. He stressed the importance of understanding there is no quick fix. It takes time to work through grief and especially when it is dealing with faith. The emotional turmoil to the “why” questions of faith must be allowed to be vented and discussed without prejudice or judgement.

He taught that when waiting for answers is when one can be most vulnerable to a faith crisis and that trying to hurry through this might make one feel better in the short term but not over time. Waiting on the Lord is a time when one can move to an understanding of, then confidence in, God's path for healing.

Having gone through a complicated grief, I so very much understand the principle of waiting. However, I will honestly say, it was not enjoyable nor something I looked at as a positive thing at the time. Now, I know how helpful it was and, as a coach, feel prepared to reach out to someone having a faith crisis. I know the importance of time, talking to an unbiased and nonjudgmental advocate who has been there and can explain the importance of waiting and allowing the Lord to walk with you to the end. I understand and can give encouragement as the client voices all the negative feelings that come with this important time. I can also, with confident assurance, remind this griever that it isn't the present that gives us faith in God but looking back at His past faithfulness and the knowledge that no matter how much we question Him or what we think of Him or say to Him in the present, He always carries us through the storm. Our goal is to lean on His promises one day at a time and one prayer at a time as we heal.