

Grief Share-Support Group

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Support Group-Greif Share

Greif Share is a support group hosted by a church in Brooklyn, for persons who have lost loved ones and is grieving. The group is an open group and members of the church as well as the wider public may join. The only requirement for joining is to have suffered a loss and is grieving. To become a group member, one must register for the group by filing out an online application, which ask for basic information and a brief explanation of the loss that was suffered. The group is operated by a faith-based organization and incorporates Christian beliefs and principles in the group's operation. The main goal of the group is to be a source of comfort and encouragement to those who are grieving. This is done through the implementation of a curriculum-based grief study with grief experts, prayer and whatever other support is available through their scope.

The group meets weekly for physical support in one of the church buildings. This was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The group now meets using zoom and other online platforms. Additionally, members can call for individual help to the counselors assigned to each group. The group consisted of ten to twelve members not including the leaders. The members ranged in ages from late teens to late adulthood. The group consisted of eight females and two males. A middle-aged Caucasian couple were absent from the group. The group leaders are members of the church's deacon board. The group has four pairs of leaders who each take turns leading the group each week. It is not clear whether the leaders are qualified grief or bereavement counselors.

The group structure includes the members who have lost loved ones and are experiencing grief. There are also the group leaders who are responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the group meetings. They report to the leadership of the church and seek consultation for subjects and issues that they are unable to resolve. The curriculum is divided into three components:

Support Group-Greif Share

video seminar, workbook activities and the weekly small group meetings. The group meetings are held on Sundays from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm where the activities completed during the week are discussed. It was difficult to say which stage of group development the group was in because it was an open group and members are probably at different stages based on their time in the group and the attachment that were formed. There is also no clear path as to how termination will be done.

The group session began with a general roll call and introduction of those present. The members were sent a web link to connect to the group. Members were asked to honor the confidentiality of the information shared by group members. They were also assured that their information would not be shared with anyone outside of the group. Leaders expressed that the information that is shared with the church leadership does not include identifying information but only the background and nature of the problem. The group leader welcomed everyone on behalf of the church's leadership. Prayer was then offered by a member of the group. New members were welcomed specially and asked to share their story with the other members. The format for the session was explained and contact information for the group leaders was shared.

Members were asked to share the challenges they were experiencing as a result of the covid-19 as it relates to their coping with grief. One member of the group shared that she lost two members of her family recently. One member was still not buried and there were concerns as to what the funeral would look like since there was a restriction on the number of persons who could attend. This was a source for additional stressors for the family who were trying to decide which member of the family should attend. Another member shared that he was unable to grieve because he feels like doing so would add additional anxiety to his family. He had recently lost his paternal grandmother who had raised him from birth. He stated that the covid-19 virus was

Support Group-Greif Share

causing a lot of fear in his family and though he was not afraid he felt like the members of his family were projecting their fear onto him. He also expressed that he was trying to stand on his faith but found it difficult. Members of the group offered

The goal of a self-help group is to assist persons who are struggling with a particular issue learn to cope. According to Zastrow there are certain characteristic that identifies a self-help group. One aspect that was evident in the grief share group I attended was the use of personal testimonies and techniques in developing coping techniques. The group was effective in helping to normalize the problems of grief. The group not only provides material, but also emotional support and members who encounter a crisis can call another group member (Zastrow, 2015). This was evidenced in one member who offered to provide another member with personal protective equipment so that she could be protected while using public transportation. The additional stress of coping with the pandemic and the changes associated with it posed a challenge for the members.

According to Hepworth and Larsen there are certain benefits to be derived from becoming a self -help group member. One that was evident in the group was the that it provided a reference for members so they could share common problem and yet be accepted by members without feeling judged (Zastrow, 2015). I found this to be helpful especially for new members who might have been apprehensive about the group. There is the potential for indirect therapeutic effects. These include a feeling of hope, as hearing the testimony of group members give other a sense that things will get better. Members also begin to universalize their problems and see them from the perspective of others. They can also gain knowledge from the experiences shared by others.

Support Group-Greif Share

The experience was an enlightening one and helped to put into perspective some of the information I had read previously in class. I was afforded the opportunity to see it physically demonstrated and could associate with the practical with the theoretical information. If I would have any criticism of the process it would be that there was no opportunity for everyone to interact with each other because of the constraint of meeting virtually. The leader in this week's meeting was a bit democratic. He allowed the opportunity for everyone to contribute but on their own merit, Persons shared and contributed as they felt led, but some members chose to be spectators. The experience gained has given me a perspective of how to run a self-help grief share group.

Support Group-Greif Share

References

Zastrow Charles, H., (2015) *Social Work with Groups: A Comprehensive Work Text*. 9th Ed., Cengage.