

Individual and Family Therapy (weekly paper Due Feb 7)

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My first point is on the topic of Grief. In the GG book I found it fascinating that dolphins have a loss of appetite when they lose their mate. Geese also searched for their mate, and had similar behavior as humans when experiencing loss. There is an attempt on the goose to look in familiar places for their lost mate. The GG book pointed out that Bowlby's attachment theory shows that when attachment is threatened or taken away there is a survival mode that kicks in for an attempt to re-establish the lost attachment. There is a myriad of reactions the book mentions such as, crying, clinging, and anger. If animals can experience depression and loss of appetite from a loss of a mate, why are we so tough on humans to move on from grieving from someone (a spouse) that they had not only an attachment like animals, but spiritual as well. If God's eye is on the sparrow or the dolphin how much more His eye is on us when we fall into grief or depression. The Bible says we have more value than many sparrows to Him. The GL book explained that unfortunately, the more secure the attachment(healthy) the greater the chance for problematic grief. This is why to me, the process of mourning or adapting to the loss, is so individual. A couple that has been married fifty plus years with a healthy attachment may have a more difficult grief. The thing that is comforting to me is that they have categorized feelings, cognitive changes, physical sensations that are a commonality to grief. These experiences are considered a part of normal grief, even though they are difficult things to understand or unusual. I would want to explain to my client that everything they are

experiencing falls under a "normal grief" category and by naming it as such would help them to not feel it had undue power over them. As Christians, we know that as we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the Lord promises we should fear no evil because the Lord himself is walking with us. I would explain that while intensity of grief in the beginning is overwhelming, it will become more manageable for daily functioning, as time passes. I would want to support them in listening to their stories about their loved one that passed and validate everything they are experiencing and feeling.

My second point is that the GG book makes a distinction between Grief and Depression. A major difference is in grief there is not a loss of self-esteem. The person's sense of self stays intact. If there is accompanying guilt, it is related to the loss itself about something the client could have done maybe to prevent the loss. Grief with guilt is more specific in nature, and falls under normal grief. Depression or chronic depression is more a generalized feeling. The client may lose self-esteem with feelings of worthlessness. This makes it more difficult to pinpoint or talk in specifics about. This is important because as a therapist I would want to be aware of depression with accompanying symptoms like suicidal ideation. Also, if grief transitions into depression, I would want to be aware to offer the use of an anti-depressant for a time as needed, and emphasize that there is no shame in that. In my generation, there definitely was a stigma attached to therapy and use of medications. Also, if the client has a history of a Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in the past it is more common to fall into an MDE episode again after a major loss. Depression can happen when anger turns inward and is aimed at the self. Lastly, helping them move past anger if present is key to recovery. Bowlby believed that only once anger has subsided can grief be healed.

My third point is from chapter five of the Journey across the Life Span, where Erik Erickson's Stages of development are discussed. In age sixty-five and over the life stage crisis is Ego Integrity versus Despair in Erickson's model. Erickson believed it was important for people in the stage of life to be able to look back with a sense of accomplishment and contentment over their life. A sense of satisfaction on a life well-lived, and important goals met. A person losing a life-long spouse or friend at this stage in life holds its own set of challenges. If the person was already struggling with a sense of despair from not having ego-integrity, and then lost a spouse on top of that complicated grief could ensue. Grieving the loss of the spouse and the loss of missed opportunities or accomplishments either alone or with the spouse could give way to a complicated grief and feelings of despair. I believe my grandmother went through this when she lost my grandfather. After his death, she died a year later sitting in her chair drinking her cup of tea. My grandfather had just retired, and they had plans to travel together across the country in a little pull-a-long trailer they had saved-up for over the years. He died suddenly of a massive heart attack. I believe she was dealing with both grief from his death, despair of not fulfilling something they wanted to experience together in life, and the loss of their dream and adventure together. My grandmother did not adapt well in the mourning process. My family was worried because she lost interest in going to church, going to bingo, or in redecorating the house (a project the family initiated to bring her out of her grief). I would sleep over to help her not be alone. I watched her many times crying and holding objects like his watch and wallet. So, in hindsight, I realize she was dealing with a lot, and she never came out of it. For future clients it is important to have compassion for where they are in life, and take everything into consideration during their grief, especially stages of development.

