
Grief Paper

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My seven most significant losses

Maturational Loss of being a child mixed with the confusion and questions of puberty.

When I was around 11 years old, I remember seeing and feeling the changes in my body as I started to enter puberty. One milestone that marked that time was the arrival of my first period, I clearly remember that day. I felt scared and alone and did not feel comfortable approaching my mom to share this with her. Unfortunately, my mother was not open to having sexual education conversations and talking about the changes in my body or what I should expect would happen from then on. Fortunately, my older sister and mom still had an active menstrual cycle, so I would just get some of their pads when I needed it. Of course, she probably noticed it a few months after. When she found out, she just approached me and said that "it was not something from another world, it is just part of life, of becoming a woman" and that I should have told her.

As I am writing about this and thinking about it, I just realized a secondary loss to this event. I also lost the opportunity to have this critical conversation that most mothers have with their daughters in this transitional moment in their lives.

I think the strategy I used to cope with the changes that were happening in my life at that time was to find some support in my relationship with some of my school friends. Since these changes are kind of universal in the time they happen. I could talk to my friends about my fears and see them going through those changes, which made me feel that I was not alone.

Loss of Dreams and school plans after Teenager's Pregnancy

Growing up, I have always felt emotionally distant from my parents, especially my mother. I craved their love and attention even though I did not know I was craving it. In addition, to being emotionally distant, my parents were not physically available, as my father worked night shifts

and slept part of the day, and my mom worked during the day but would always go out with her friends at night. As a result, my siblings and I were pretty much raised on our own, opening the door for "predators" to come into our lives.

When I was only thirteen years old, I ended up unexpectedly getting involved in a relationship with a guy six years older than me who deceived my family and me in so many ways that even though my father did not want to allow me to date him, my mom ended up convincing him that they should let the relationship to happen. The result was me having a baby at 14 years old. I was numb for most of my pregnancy, I remember seeing my friends going places and having fun, and I would feel sad because I could not do any of that. I stopped going to school because I was ashamed, and for many years I had to put my studies on hold because now I had to take care of the baby and eventually would have to start working to help provide for her.

The way I coped with this time in my life was to pretend I was another person; for many months, I would pretend in my mind that I had a perfect life. I lived in denial of my reality so I would not have to face the pain I was feeling. Eventually, I made new friends, and things got back to normal, and I could find joy again in the "real world."

The third significant Loss in my life was the divorce of my parents; I Loss the stability and unity of having a family.

It was early in the morning when I woke up to the sound of a bitter cry coming from the living room. My father came home after working his night shift to find out that my mother had left him and moved out of the house. To this day, I do not know if they ever talked about this decision, if she warned him or not. My siblings and I were just warned by my mother about the marriage

problems they facing just a few days earlier, but in my 15 years old mind, I did not grasp what she was trying to communicate by “marriage problems”.

The night of her departure, she just got home and started packing her things, saying that she had found a place to stay, so she was moving out. Everything was so sudden and weird. I was, in a sense, paralyzed and in shock, but also, in a sense, I was indifferent to the situation because we also had found out a few months earlier that my mom had been cheating on my father for a long time.

Although she assured us on that night that she was not leaving my father because of another man, I found otherwise, one week after, when I visited her in her new house, she was actually living with another man. The man that she had left my father for. I remember looking at his face and feeling disgusted, angry, and paralyzed among so many emotions. So I left immediately; after that, I could not look at or talk to my mom for a couple of months. Not just because of lies and for abandoning her family because of another guy but also because I saw firsthand the emotional damage she left on my father.

My father coped with this Loss by drinking a lot, especially on Saturdays when it was his night off from work, and his friends and cousins would come over to the house and play cards and drink for the whole night. But I knew that at some point after he have had too many drinks, he would come inside and cry inconsolably - so I would wait for him.

For many months I lost the exemplary father who would model how we should behave, my most excellent example in life. I lost, of course, both parents living under the same roof. I lost my trust in my mother because of her lies and the bad choices she made. I lost the trips we would go together to the beach. I lost the family gathering on Sunday after church, where usually my mom

would cook an awesome meal for us - not counting the everyday cooking obligation that my father and I now had to share. So many other losses came after the divorce, but one that accompanied me for a long time was the Loss of trust in people. For a long time, I was scared of getting married because I feared that my mom's bad reputation would follow me or that I would be betrayed just as my father was.

Looking back I realized that my way to cope with this Loss was going out partying, drinking, engaging in immoral sexual relationships without committing to anyone, and working hard to accomplish things in life, trying to deceive myself by saying that I did not need anyone in my life, that I was self-sufficient until I realized that I was not.

Loss of my mother to cancer

Twelve years after my mom left my father, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. At that time, our relationship was restored since I stopped talking to her for a while after the divorce. I had so many questions I wanted to have asked her before she died, but none of us saw her death coming; it was so unexpected. First, she underwent surgery to remove the tumor, but it had grown so much that it spread to her intestines. So even after removing all her reproductive organs, uterus, and ovaries, she had to do chemotherapy, which in the beginning it seemed to be working. At least based on the results of her blood work. Still, suddenly, she started to get sick, and within two months, she ended up dying.

It was during my mom's sickness that I was saved, so I think I could cope better because Jesus comforted and sustained me during that time.

I remember one day, though, probably around two or three months after my mom's death, when I had some friends over at my house to have dinner, and we ended up having some drinks; we

were listening to music and having a good time. I remember stopping momentarily as I noticed my happiness and felt guilty for being happy when I should be "grieving" my mom's death. I have never shared this with anyone, but today I understand this feeling (conflict) is normal.

Loss of the presence of my family after immigrating to the USA

In 2010 my husband me and my daughter decided to move to the USA to study and live here. My husband already had some family here including his parents, but I was leaving everyone other than my daughter behind. So, as we moved, here there was a mixture of feelings, excitement for the future, and what the Lord had in store for us. But on the other hand, it was challenging since I have always been so close to my father and siblings, so being unable to see them was painful. It was specially tough on special occasions such as, birthdays, Christmas, and Easter... also every Sunday, I would really miss them.

How I coped with the pain of not having my family was to build relationships with people from my church here. I used to go to a Brazilian church, so most people there shared the same background and pain of being away from their loved ones. So, in a sense, we became each other's family; we would gather together on those special dates that we would usually spend with family. Another way that I used to cope was holding on to Bible verses and being reminded that the best place to be is where God wants me to be. It felt like the Lord was doing to my family as he did with Abraham, taking us from the midst of our relatives to work in our lives, holding on to this truth helped me to keep moving.

Loss of two pregnancies

For eight years, my husband and I had tried to get pregnant. We started trying in 2012, and finally, I became pregnant at the end of 2013. After missing my period, and doing the pregnancy

test, it came out positive. We were overwhelmed with joy. Since we had been trying for a long time already, and everyone knew we were trying, we announced the good news to the church on Sunday. That was a big mistake since it made it even harder to deal with the miscarriage that would happen the following Friday. It is easy to announce good news, but how hard it is to share bad ones. I felt sad, defeated, and less than.

My way of coping was to keep praying and believing it would happen at the right time. One year passed, and in 2014, I got pregnant again, but this time I learned my lesson and did not tell anybody, just my husband. Good thing I did not tell other people because only a few days after we found out, I had another miscarriage. At the end of the day, not telling other people did not make the process any easy. The struggle was still there, and the pain was still there because the Loss was still there. How did I cope?

Exercise helped me a lot; keeping my mind and body busy helped me not to think about it all the time. I would also "pretend" that everything was OK while hoping that, eventually, everything would be OK.

Well, at the end of the day, everything did not turn out OK, at least not how I had hoped. And this is my final Loss.

The Loss of the dream of having a biological child with my husband.

Eleven years have passed since we started trying to get pregnant. After the second miscarriage, I was diagnosed with uterine fibroids and had to undergo one procedure and one extensive surgery to remove it. Three years ago, when I did the last surgery, the doctor told me that, humanly speaking, it would be impossible for me to get pregnant since my egg reserve was very low.

Even after he said that to me, I kept hoping and even told him - there is nothing impossible for God. I kept hoping against hope.

But, now I am already facing a few symptoms of early menopause at age 39; So, I have come to terms with the fact that this is not happening. The way I am coping with this Loss is by accepting it and reminding myself that God knows better, and he knows what is best for me. He is the one who gives life; it is not in my power. To this day, I continue to bring those truths to my mind, and also read books and listen to podcasts on the topic that will encourage me.

Family-of-origin and ethnicity factors that influence grief

I believe that one factor that influences how we grieve as a family is doing the funeral rituals and the burial ceremony together. These rituals serve a vital function in providing us with a direct confrontation with the reality of death and also allow us to pay final respects to the deceased, sharing our suffering as a family while receiving support from friends and family. After seven days, the family also gathers again to honor the memory of the deceased, which helps us to adapt better as we deal with the Loss.

Strengths and deficits in my family's personal mourning process

I believe one of my family's strengths in their mourning process is to keep moving forward despite the many losses they have faced.

From what I have experienced, we all adapt well as a family after a loss; we all accept the reality of death without denying that the deceased is not with us anymore, and as soon as possible, we reorganize our lives without the person (or thing) that has been lost.

On the other hand, I believe we do not do well as a family in our personal mourning process in how we communicate our feelings in the adaptation of the Loss. Growing up, I do not remember talking about death; it was almost like a tabu. Even after my mom died, we never sat down to ask each other how we felt and share our struggles. It took an assignment in Dr. Mercurio's class for me to find the courage to ask my father and my siblings how some of the losses we have experienced together had affected them individually. So although we adapt well, we could be more vulnerable regarding our feelings.

Most significant points of learning

One of the most significant points I have learned about grief therapy is that people grieve differently. Even though we are all human beings, we do not respond to losses in the same way; therefore, we do not grieve in the same way. Consequently, when applying grief therapy, one should not see the person through a list of diagnostic criteria but carefully uniquely approach each individual—keeping in mind that each person's grief is like no other person's grief.

Second, learning about the distinction between grief, mourning, and bereavement helped me better understand the topic. Grief is the normal process of reacting to a loss. Grief can be in response to a physical loss, such as a death, or a social loss, including a relationship or job.

Mourning is the process by which people adapt to a loss. Cultural beliefs, practices, and rituals greatly influence mourning. Bereavement is the period during which the person tries to adjust after a loss. The time spent in bereavement for the Loss of a loved one depends on the circumstances of the Loss and the level of attachment to the person who died.

The third most significant point of learning was about the tasks of mourning. There are four tasks the mourner should accomplish in adapting to Loss. The task I: Accept the Reality of the Loss.

Task II: Process the pain of grief. Task III: Adjust to a world without the deceased. Task IV find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's own journey in life. While the bereaved do not have to complete the tasks in a specific order, there is some natural order in that completing some tasks assumes the completion of another task. I like this approach because the tasks call people into action, and we can help them find hope to regain control of their life.

Finally, the fourth significant takeaway was learning about the Mediators of Mourning: Kingship is one of the strongest predictors of grief. The kind of relationship the person had with the deceased will significantly influence how the person is affected by the Loss.

The strength of attachment, the emotional security of the attachment, the ambivalence in the relationship, conflicts with the deceased, and how dependent the relationship was will significantly affect how a person responds and adapts to the death.

How the person died and the proximity to death: The death will be grieved differently depending on how it happened. Deaths are categorized into natural, accidental, suicidal, and homicidal.

How sudden or unexpected the death was. How violent or traumatic the event of the death was will also affect the impact of the loss.

Multiple losses in one event or a short period can contribute to bereavement overload.

Preventable deaths can also be a strong mediator affecting grief because the person may deal with the guilt and blame for losing the deceased. Historical antecedents: Unresolved Loss and grief, previous losses, and mental health history can affect the current mourning process. Finally, personality variables: Personality structure should be considered while understanding an individual response to Loss. (Worden, 2018)

References

Worden, J. W. (2018). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*. New York: Springer .