

Grief and Loss Group in an Inpatient Psychiatry Unit: “This is the best group!”

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Inpatient Psychiatry Population

- Empathic
- Trauma survivors
- Brutally honest
- Respond best to peer support, a sense of community
- Looking for meaning



Opening the Group

- Names
- A description of spiritual care as it relates to grief:
 - Body, mind, spirit (I address the “spirit” part)
 - Spirit can be seen as the part of us deep down inside where we are most uniquely ourselves and where we carry our stories and our deepest feelings.



Guidelines / Kindlines

1. Please keep what you hear in confidence.
2. Please leave room for each other.
3. You don't have to speak. One of the most important things we do in this group is bear witness. Your presence in that respect is hugely important. Thanks for being here.
4. Feel free to come and go as you need to. Take care of yourself.
5. We are going to try not to make each other feel better or fix each other. One way to respond to another's sharing is to say something like: *I can relate to that—I also lost my grandmother when I was a kid, and she was “my person”.*



Defining Loss

- Loss of loved ones through death, sometimes traumatically
- Loss of relationships (lovers, family members, friends)
- Loss of pets
- Loss of job, home, car, possessions
- Loss of a sense of purpose or meaning
- Loss of function
- Loss of self
- Loss of joy or dreams of the future
- Childhoods that should have been very different



Defining Grief

Grief is all the feelings we have after a loss of any kind.

Fear

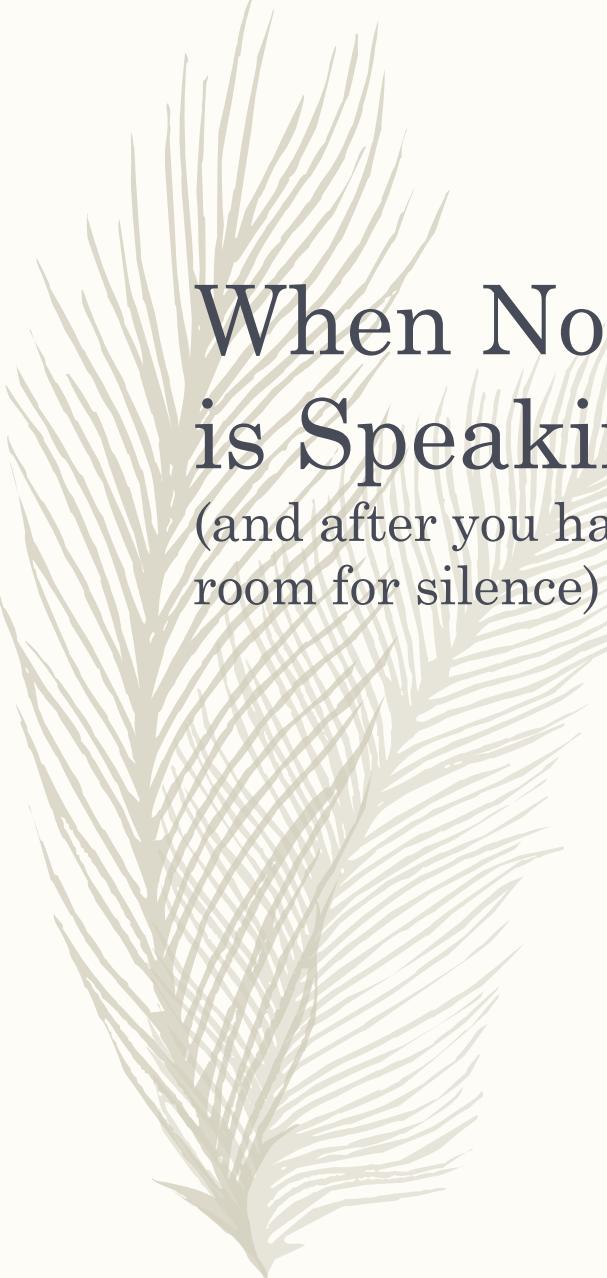
Guilt

Anger

Sadness
(tears)

Regret

Numbness



When No One is Speaking

(and after you have left
room for silence)

- Offer reflections on grief and loss:
 - Happiness cult of our society
 - We are supposed to “get over it” and “move on.”
 - Shame and isolation can be worse than the grief itself.
 - Maya Angelou: “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
- Acknowledge nods and murmurs of agreement.
- Offer to answer questions.



Containing Distractions

- *It sounds like you've been there yourself, Michael.*
- *Hold on, let's stay with Stacy right now.*
- *Ryan, is there more?*
- *And we're staying with Chris and his feelings of guilt right now.*
- *I just want to check in with Rory. How are you doing?*
- *Thanks for sharing that, Jodie. I wonder if anyone else can relate to what you've shared.*



A Blessing to End the Group

May you know that you share sorrow and suffering with so many others
who are in this world with you

May you have the sometimes-difficult blessing of all of your feelings
and safe people to help you hold them

May you know how precious you are, a gift to this world

And may you have peace

Amen

Final Thoughts . . .

- Speaking our stories and having them heard and honored brings relief.
- A terrible childhood doesn't erase the child who came into this world hardwired for love. We never stop looking for love. Under all the pain, we all seem to have what Clarissa Pinkola Estes called "an unruined heart."
- Grief comes in waves, taking us down and then up and then down again. Even in the midst of tears, a smile or a giggle can emerge as a brief up-wave.
- Shame and isolation are far harder to bear than grief.
- Hearing the stories of others' pain can ease a terrible sense of isolation—"I am not alone."
- Deep suffering often (I suspect *always*) gives birth to deep compassion for others who suffer.



If you remember nothing else...

- We need to tell our hardest stories.
- We need to be witnessed and affirmed in our suffering.

Do not be afraid of sorrow. Sorrow is rain that falls in the dark night, watering the seeds of compassion that they may grow to heal a hurting world.



Thank you for sharing this presentation with me.

I am a perpetual student of grief and suffering and would love to hear about ways you have tended to the grievers in your care, or any thoughts you have about this presentation.

I can be reached at: Patsy.Fortney@cvmc.org



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