

Loss:

a universal experience

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

In order for the students to understand the categories of loss they need to be aware of the changes in their own lives and how feelings of loss accompany these changes.

Students need to be aware that not all the feelings they list will necessarily be negative.

Community Matters

Chapter 3 explores the social and cultural contexts of many of the issues around loss and grief.

MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

Four key messages that students should have learnt before participating in these sessions:

- people react differently to loss experiences
- there are strategies which help people cope with their own and / or a friend's loss experiences
- everyone needs to be able to identify sources of help
- people from different cultural / ethnic / religious backgrounds may cope with loss in different ways.

These can be addressed by covering some of the activities from sessions 1 to 6.

Intention

In this lesson it is intended that students:

- be able to describe the categories of loss.

Resources

- Optional — Coloured dots / stars / pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)
- *Information sheet: Categories of loss* developed by Bertha Simons
- *Activity sheet: Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences* – for homework

How to

ACTIVITY 1: Change and loss

1. Ask the students to work in groups of four or five to list the sorts of changes that occur in the lives of those around their age. Each group can write their list of changes on butchers' paper or on an overhead transparency. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.
2. Ask the students to report the changes their group has listed. Ask for one change from each group (asking students not to

repeat a response already given by another group) and continue this process until each group has exhausted their list.

3. Compare changes the students listed with those listed in the *Information sheet: Categories of loss*.

ACTIVITY 2: Feelings

1. Reform groups. Ask the students to try and think of the feelings associated with the four categories of changes. Make a list of the feelings.
2. Ask the students to report back using the same process as the first group activity.
3. Briefly discuss the range of feelings expressed. Look for similarities and differences between the groups such as gender differences. At this point draw attention to the positive feelings expressed and recognise that good feelings tend not to cause us a problem. We do not tend to seek help because we are happy!
4. Delete the positive feelings from the lists they developed in task 2. What we now have listed are what we can describe as grief reactions and these will be explored in the next lesson.

You may want to distinguish between thoughts and feelings.

Keep these lists for use in the next lesson.

Homework

Ask the students to work on the *Activity sheet: Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences* at home with parents or caregivers to identify life events experienced as a family. Bring their responses to the next lesson. The aim of this is to try to establish how much change has occurred in the families of the students.

If this survey is not appropriate for your group of students, consider using the following alternative:

- In pairs, brainstorm examples of loss.
- Allot up to 100 points for each event.
- Create a class survey of the results.
- Individual students add up their own scores.
- Discuss help-seeking strategies for 'high scores'.

Referral

If you are concerned about a student in your class, follow-up afterwards. Talk to the student. Refer the matter to the welfare teacher. Continue to monitor.

A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Provide access to counsellors for students and staff dealing with the impact of family separation



Categories of loss

Loss has been grouped into four major categories:

THE LOSS OF A SIGNIFICANT PERSON

THE LOSS OF A PART OF THE SELF

THE LOSS OF EXTERNAL OBJECTS

DEVELOPMENTAL LOSS

While these losses are listed in the various categories, there is considerable overlap and one loss often impinges on another; as a result the distinctions between categories tend to blur.

1. Loss of a significant person

Death of a loved one — the ultimate loss, final and complete; also desertion, separation, divorce, abortion, stillbirth.

2. Loss of part of the self

a. Physical — structural and functional.

Structural loss: loss of a limb, loss of an organ, disfigurement, loss of hair, loss of teeth, any outward change, loss of body image (through surgery, burns, accident).

Functional loss: loss through stroke, paralysis, deafness, blindness, arthritis, infertility.

b. Psychological — loss of memory, judgement, pride, control, status, usefulness, independence, esteem, values, ideas.

c. Social — loss of roles, employment, friends; geographic moves, travel.

d. Community and cultural — loss through immigration, urban renewal, refugee experience.

3. Loss of external objects

Loss of possessions — money, jewels, property, and 'symbols of identity'— such as photographs and artefacts, through burglary, robbery and natural disasters, such as floods and fire.

4. Developmental loss

Birth trauma, weaning, growing up, school, exam failures, school-to-work transition, leaving home, new relationships, marriage, old age, multiple cumulative losses.

Community Matters

Chapter 3 expands on what loss can be for young people in particular circumstances.

The Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences



Read the events listed below, and circle the number next to any event that has occurred in your life recently. There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is just to help identify which of these events you have experienced lately. A recent event is one which you think is still affecting you.

LIFE EVENTS	LIFE CHANGE UNITS (LCUs)
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Jail term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Gain of new family member	37
Change to different line of work	36
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Mortgage over \$30 000	31
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Partner begins or stops work	26
Begin or end school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Mortgage or loan less than \$30 000	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violations of law	11
Total	

Now add up the numbers you have circled to obtain your total life change units score.

(Based on Worksheet 17 Glasscock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses*. Newtown, Millennium Books)

Grief

is normal

MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

Intention

In this lesson it is intended that students:

- identify normal grief reactions.

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

Resources

- *Activity sheet: Normal grief reactions*

How to

ACTIVITY 1: Change and stress

1. Review content covered in previous lesson, such as the changes experienced by the students and the feelings of loss associated with those changes. Revisit the lists of grief reactions from the previous lesson.
2. Ask the students to share with the group the changes they identified on the Holmes-Rahe Survey. Some issues that could be discussed at this stage could include whether the family members discussed their own personal reactions to change and whether individual family members' scores differed.
3. Explain that the LCU only gives an indication of the amount of stress a person is likely to experience. A score of 300 or more indicates there is a high degree of stress; between 200 and 300, a reasonable degree of stress; 200 or below, a limited amount of stress. Explain to students that we need to remember that stress is associated with loss and therefore grief.
4. If a student scores more than 300, remind them that this scale is only an *indication* of stress and that people react differently to events. How stressful the event experienced is also depends on the support received from family, friends and the school.

Privacy

Some students may be reluctant to share the results of this survey and their privacy needs to be respected.

Respect students' rights to privacy. They may be more comfortable sharing with a buddy.

5. Ask students to recall the changes they had originally listed and the feelings that accompanied those changes. Ask students to respond to these questions on a sheet of paper.
 - What did you do with those feelings or how did you behave?
 - What kind of messages did you receive from your families?
 - Do you think people understood your feelings?
 - What would you have liked people to say?

Ask students to share their responses with the class.

6. Show the *Activity sheet: Normal grief reactions*. For anyone disturbed by their reactions, this list will provide a means for normalising their experience.

Teacher talk: Change and loss

Explain to students that change and loss often involve crisis. In Chinese, 'crisis' stands for danger and opportunity. Ask the class to identify any positive outcomes of their changes.

Remind students that if they have become upset by thinking and talking about these things, they can discuss this with you, the school counsellor, the pastoral care teacher and others. They need to feel that they can access support if they need it.

A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers to talk with staff members to increase staff understanding of grief pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how to deal with upsets that manifest in the classroom



Normal grief reactions

1 EMOTIONS

Anxiety and fear
Sad
Guilt
Angry
Inadequacy
Hurt
Relieved
Loneliness

2 PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

Hollowness in stomach
Tightness in chest
Oversensitivity to noise
A sense of depersonalisation
Breathlessness
Weakness of muscles
Lack of energy
Dry mouth

3 COGNITIONS

Disbelief
Confusion
Preoccupation
Sense of presence of bereaved
Hallucinations

4 BEHAVIOURS



This is all normal!

Sleep disturbances
Appetite disturbances
Absent-minded behaviours
Social withdrawal
Dreams of the deceased
Avoiding reminders of the deceased
Searching and calling out
Sighing
Restless overactivity
Crying
Visiting places and carrying objects that remind the survivor of the deceased
Treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased

Understanding

loss in response to death

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- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

Allow the discussion to be reasonably free but still focused on the categories and why they think they fit these categories.

MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- discuss the various ways people die
- identify the likely grief responses to expected and unexpected death.

Resources

- Collect a whole range of material which helps the students gain an awareness of the different kinds of death that are reported. The material could include such things as death notices in the daily press, any major accidents, catastrophic events, war items, suicides, murders, child and adolescent deaths, reports of children dying, and people with AIDS and other life threatening illnesses. Try to make the materials as broad as possible. It may be appropriate to ask the students during the previous week to collect this material.
- *Information sheet: Determinants of grief*
- *Optional* — coloured dots/stars/pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)

How to

ACTIVITY 1: Different deaths

1. Divide students into groups of four or five. Distribute the materials that have been collected about different kinds of death so that each group has a range of topics. Ask the students to read the materials in their groups.
2. Ask the class: Is there any way in which we could categorise these deaths? List student responses on the board.

3. Suggest to students that one means of categorisation could be *mode of death*. Categories include: natural, accidental, suicidal, homicidal. Explain that each of these kinds of death will bring quite different grief reactions.

ACTIVITY 2: Determinants of grief

1. Handout *Information sheet: Determinants of grief*. Explain each of the major points on the overhead, allowing students to question and discuss the issues raised. Use the *Teacher information sheet: Determinants of grief* to assist you.
2. Revisit the materials distributed at the start of the lesson. Students are to select one item from the materials. Ask the students to consider the factors associated with the loss reported and suggest how this would impact on the grief reactions of those that knew the person.



A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Work with local religious, cultural and community groups to find out how schools can support a bereaved student



A number of factors will determine a person's response to a loss

These include:

- who the person was
- the nature of the attachment
 - a. strength of the attachment
 - b. security of the attachment
 - c. uncertainty of the importance of the relationship
 - d. conflicts with the deceased
- mode of death
- history of losses
- individual characteristics
- social environment factors
- concurrent stresses.



Determinants of grief

TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET

The Parkes and Weiss, Harvard Bereavement Study 1983, endeavoured to identify the likely ways in which people would respond to a major loss.

A number of factors will determine the person's response. Among these will be the age and the stage of life cycle of the person who has died and of the grieving person. The study revealed the following factors:

Who the person was

To predict how a person might respond to a major loss through death, we need to know the relationship the person had to the dead person, for example, parent, friend, child, sibling, lover, grandparent.

The nature of the attachment

How strong was the relationship or how attached were they to the deceased person?

- a. strength of the attachment — how much did they love the person?
- b. security of the attachment — to what extent was the deceased person important for their ongoing sense of security and self-esteem?
- c. uncertainty of the importance of the relationship — while some degree of mixed feelings is normal in any relationship, if the negative feelings are stronger, the surviving person is likely to have more difficulty in resolving the grief.
- d. conflicts with the deceased — where a history of conflict has been part of the relationship (especially physical and / or sexual abuse) difficulty in resolving the grief can be expected.

Mode of death

Grief reactions will be related to how the person died. The method of categorisation was referred to earlier: natural, accidental, suicidal, homicidal. As might be expected, it is more difficult to resolve grief associated with accidental and unexpected death than with a natural death. Similarly, suicide and murder create quite different and often disturbing grief reactions. Because this is such an important issue it is dealt with in an extension lesson for teachers who want to spend more time on this issue.

History of losses

What previous experience with loss has the grieving person and how have they coped? Do they have a history of mental illness, particularly depression? This can be related to the Holmes-Rahe Survey of Recent Experiences (Lesson 8). The greater number of changes, the more difficult the resolution of the loss.

Individual characteristics

The age and sex of the person and their personality type — how do they cope with stressful events? Are they a dependent person? Do they express their feelings freely? People with particular personality disorders will have a more difficult time and perhaps need specialised help.

Social environment factors

The social group to which the person belongs, with its cultural attitudes to grief, rituals for mourning, ethnic and religious variables; the support networks available to the mourner; possibility of the secondary gain from being a mourner, making it hard to 'let go' of the role.

Concurrent stresses

Where a high level of disruption occurs following a death, for example, economic reversals, moving house, school and so on.

(Based on Worksheet 17, Glassock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books)

Supporting

grieving friends and relatives

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- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

Some students may be reluctant to share their responses and their privacy needs to be respected.

MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- identify strategies they can employ to be supportive to grieving people
- identify possible differences in grieving patterns between males and females.

This session may need to be taught over two lessons.

Resources

- Song 'I Will Survive' Gloria Gaynor (or current song with similar message)
- *Information sheet: Unhelpful strategies*
- *Information sheet: Guidelines for being a supportive person*

How to

ACTIVITY 1: Grief reactions

1. Review with the class people's grief reactions from session 9. Ask the class to think of a loss experience that affected them greatly and to recall the following list of coping behaviours. These can be reviewed from session 3, *Information sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*:

- talking to others
- talking it through by myself
- crying
- through the support of friends
- accepted it as time passed
- kept busy
- developed new relationships
- family support
- religious beliefs
- by writing or drawing about my feelings
- by philosophical beliefs.

Privacy

Some students may be reluctant to share their responses and their privacy needs to be respected.

Refer to 'Gender differences in adolescent loss reactions, and coping styles' (in the information section in the front of this booklet).

2. Invite the class to write down on their sheets, any coping behaviours they employed. Collate class responses. If it is a mixed gender class, discuss whether gender differences have appeared in the collation of the class's responses.

Explain the following information in terms of male and female grieving patterns.

Teacher talk

Research has identified different grieving patterns for males and females.

In general, males tend to look at losses involving interpersonal relationships in a problem-solving way: that is, males tend to try to find answers to their grief, whereas females react by exploring their feelings and therefore look for someone to listen to them.

Society tends to focus more on females who are grieving because of the form their grief takes. Males can be overlooked. They may need to be helped to work through their grief in behavioural rather than verbal ways, yet still be encouraged to deal with feelings. The feelings include the reality of the loss: the failure to explore feeling can prolong grief. Conversely, females may need help with problem-solving. Thus, the grief processes of males and females may be different, not the feelings. There may also be cultural differences.

ACTIVITY 2: Masculine and feminine grieving patterns

1. Divide the class into small groups of three or four, each group having at least one male and one female (if this is a mixed class). Ask the class to discuss the above findings in relation to their own experiences with grieving people. After allowing adequate time for discussion, invite the class to share their thoughts on gender differences in grieving patterns.
2. Explain to the class that when interacting with a grieving person, there are strategies that should be avoided as they have been found to be unhelpful. Distribute *Information sheet: Unhelpful strategies*. Go through this and discuss it with the class.

3. After this, point out to the class that many factors can vary these guidelines, things such as:
 - the context of the statement
 - what a grieving person expects from the support network
 - the types of support available (like informational, social, emotional, practical)
 - when the particular type of support is offered, that is, people have different needs at different times in their grieving.
4. Invite the class to share any experiences they have had that are similar to those identified.
5. Inform the class that there are things that can be done to support grieving people. Distribute *Information sheet: Guidelines for being a supportive person*. Go through this and discuss with students.
6. Say that human beings are enormously resilient and, with support, can overcome great crises. Play the song 'I Will Survive' by Gloria Gaynor. Ask the class to identify the grief response of the singer, that is, how she responds to her broken love affair. What was it that made the singer 'a survivor'?

A Mental Health Promotion strategy



Provide pastoral care and personal development for all students



Unhelpful strategies

1. Avoidance behaviours refusing to bring up the subject, or avoiding the person

2. Directives 'You will have to be the head of the family now'; 'You will have to get control of yourself'

3. Forcing behaviour being pressured to talk about it, being pressured into new relationships

4. Judging 'Why are you acting this way?'; 'don't take it so hard'

5. Suggesting full understanding 'I know exactly how you feel'

6. Comparing losses 'At least it's not as bad as...'

7. Random judgements 'It's for the best'; 'She's better off now'

8. God's needs 'It was God's will'; 'God needed him in heaven'

(Adapted from Glasscock, G. & Rowling L (1992) *Learning to Grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books, pg 105.)

Guidelines for being a supportive person



- Accept feelings no matter what they are or how unusual they appear.
- Maintain predictability and stability in the environment.
- Accept silences without filling them with words.
- Use physical touch if acceptable when words seem inappropriate.
- Encourage expression of emotion.
- Adopt an understanding and empathetic attitude that encourages expression of thoughts and feelings.
- Refrain from: giving advice; telling them what to feel; telling them what to think; or insisting the person talk about their loss.
- Accept that you cannot stop the bereaved's feelings of loss, but you can help the bereaved name and express the pain the loss causes.

**Your gift to the bereaved is yourself.
Grieving people remember most what you
choose to be, not what you choose to say.**

- **Be there.**
- **Listen.**
- **Allow and encourage expression of feeling.**
- **Give non-verbal support when appropriate.**

