

Week 11: Loss/Opportunity

- Grief Cycle
- Five Stages of Recovering from Loss
- How do you deal with loss?
- Myths of dealing with loss.
- Loss Graph (timeline exercise)
- Use the Problem Map (inserting grief/loss as the issue)

MODULE 11: LOSS/OPPORTUNITY

Sometimes changes in life, even positive changes, result in losses. When you experience a loss it is important to work through the associated thoughts and feelings. This working through is called **grieving**. Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. People grieve over the death of someone they love and sometimes over life changes including changes in family patterns or behaviors (even negative patterns or behaviors). Grieving is related to adjusting and adapting.

Examples of situations which may facilitate grieving include: 1) children starting, graduating, or going off to school; 2) getting married; 3) getting divorced; 4) addictions; 5) recovery from addiction; 6) retirement. The list could get exhausting. (*Ask for examples from their own lives of situations of loss/grief have occurred.*)

The negatives or losses in each of these situations may or may not be easy to pick out (*see if the client can identify the negative or loss in at least one or two of the examples*). Can you pick out the potential positive(s) in any of these situations? Quite often with losses also comes opportunity, and you need to be prepared to look for it. There are stages to the grieving process: 1) denial, 2) anger, 3) bargaining, 4) despair, 5) acceptance. These stages do not occur in the same order for everyone.

WHAT IS MEANT BY RESOLVING GRIEF/LOSS?

1. Claiming your circumstances instead of them claiming you (discuss what this means).
2. Being able to enjoy fond memories without having the precipitation of painful feelings of loss, guilt, regret, or remorse.
3. Finding new meaning in living, and living without the fear of future abandonment.
4. Acknowledging that it is okay to feel bad from time to time, and to talk about those feelings.
5. Being able to forgive others when they say or do things that you know are based on a lack of knowledge and understanding.

WHY ARE PEOPLE NOT PREPARED TO DEAL WITH LOSS?

1. They have been taught to acquire things not to lose them.
2. They have been taught that acquiring things will help them feel complete or whole.
3. They have been taught that if they lose something replacing the loss will make it easier (i.e., bury their feelings).

WHAT ARE THE MYTHS OF DEALING WITH LOSS?

1. Put off until later to do things that are frightening or painful.
2. Regret the past (get stuck wanting it different, better, or more).
3. Just give it time.
4. Grieve alone (don't need to talk about thoughts or feelings).

Discuss two of the major issues surrounding loss/grief: 1) burying your feelings and 2) forgetting the loss.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE READY?

1. You've realized that a problem exists.
2. You've realized that the problem is associated with the loss.
3. You realize/acknowledge that you are now willing to deal with your loss.

FINDING THE SOLUTION: THE FIVE STAGES OF RECOVERING LOSS

1. Growing Awareness – that issues are unresolved.
2. Accepting Responsibility – for resolving the loss.
3. Identifying – what you need to do to resolve the loss.
4. Taking Action – to resolve the loss.
5. Moving Beyond Loss – through sharing with others and taking action which facilitates resolution and growth.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH LOSS?

People deal with loss in various ways. Do you identify with any of the following examples?

1. Intellectualize – don't deal with feelings, don't talk or write about how they feel.
2. Be fine and put on a happy face for those around you "Academy Award Winning Recovery."
3. Want the approval of others; want others to be accepting of your feelings.
4. Acting out ("don't expect anything from me because I hurt so bad").

Discuss and/or write about how you have dealt with the loss(es) you have experienced.

GRIEF: The natural emotional response to the loss of a cherished idea, person, or thing.

Grief is intense emotional suffering caused by a loss. When unresolved, it can lead to acute anxiety and depression. Usually when we think of loss and the grief process, we think of someone very close to us dying or leaving. When this happens, we experience intense emotional pain (hurt, sadness). So we can say that grief is the natural, normal,

inevitable process that all humans beings experience when they lose something that is important to them.

There are various things that a person can experience during the course of their life that can result in feeling grief and loss. – Death of a loved one; end of an important relationship; changing schools; moving to new neighborhood; loss of a job; physical impairment; loss of a pet; loss of old lifestyle (i.e., stop drinking/drugging, loss of income, health, etc.); recognizing that life dreams will not be realized, etc.

Many times we feel loss and the grief associated with it due to things that we wanted to happen, but never did so you feel hopeless about them. – happy childhood, to belong to a sorority/fraternity, have a specific person care about you, have more supportive parents/children, a great body, good complexion, different color eyes (not accepting self), parents that were home or spent time with you or didn't get drunk and abusive, grandparents, etc.

Give “Grief Cycle” Handout and discuss/process with client(s).

GRIEF CYCLE (Where are you Stuck?)

1. DENIAL (Isolation)
 - A. Powerlessness
 - B. Psychological Buffer (defense) – protects knowledge or awareness of thoughts or feelings that you are not ready to deal with mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.
 - C. Denial of Reality
 - 1) The more you have depended on the last object, the stronger your denial.

2. ANGER (Self-Disappointment, Self-Hatred)
 - A. Anger over loss and not being able to find it/fix it/stop it.
 - 1) Regrets
 - B. Can become destructive if not expressed in healthy ways.
 - 1) Out of control anger = rage, violence
 - 2) Held in, stuffed anger = out of control physical illness.
 - a) anger turned inward toward self = Depression
 - b) despair, suicide

3. BARGAINING (Postponing the inevitable. Attempt to control the uncontrollable)
 - A. “What If’s” and “If Only”
 - B. Desperate attempt to regain control
 - C. Keeps you from facing reality
 - D. Destructive if one gets stuck here.

4. DEPRESSION (Sorrow, Despair)
 - A. Anger channeled back into self, turned inward against self.
 - B. Response typically associated with grief but actually only one part of the whole process.
 - 1) Tears, funerals, wakes allow you to be sad.
 - 2) Trapped (stuck) sorrow = self-pity leads to destructive behavior
 - 3) Can be immobilizing = total helplessness
 - 4) Crying is a good way to express sorrow. It washes away sadness. Heals. Is a sign of strength when used as part of the grieving process, but if stuck crying can become a chronic behavior, which does not effectively promote grieving.

5. ACCEPTANCE
 - A. Final goal with achieving resolution of grief.
 - B. Belief that it is possible to heal and recover.
 - C. Surrender to reality.
 - D. Recognition of responsibility = ACTION

GRIEF CYCLE (Where are you Stuck?) (clinicians copy)

From this place of pain, hurt, and disappointment comes a wall of protection called DENIAL. – I don't care. It's not really that. Who wants it anyway. Everyone does it. There's no problem. Drugs aren't my problem., Etc.

1. DENIAL (Isolation)
 - a. Powerlessness
 - b. Psychological Buffer (defense) – protects knowledge or awareness of thoughts or feelings that you are not ready to deal with mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.
 - c. Denial of Reality
 - i. The more you have depended on the last object, the stronger your denial.

Process with client how their mental illness or substance use/abuse can aid in them staying stuck in this area. How are they aware of using MI or SA to deny their feelings with regard to their loss/grief? I.e., stuffing feelings, delusional/irrational thinking, etc.

When we quit denying our loss, we move into the next state. ANGER. Your anger may be reasonable or unreasonable and it may be felt in varying degrees. Hate. Rage. Anger. Frustrated. Hurt. Upset. Irritated..... This is the stage that blaming occurs. Perhaps distrust, revenge, or get even. Externalization takes place --- “It's all his/her fault.” (Exercise: Make a list of all the people, places, and things you are angry about to some degree. Process list – look for stage of loss/grief, irrational thoughts involved, etc.)

2. ANGER (Self-Disappointment, Self-Hatred)
 - a. Anger over loss and not being able to find it/fix it/stop it.
 - i. Regrets
 - b. Can become destructive if not expressed in healthy ways.
 - i. Out of control anger = rage, violence
 - ii. Held in, stuffed anger = out of control physical illness.
 1. anger turned inward toward self = Depression
 2. despair, suicide

Openly discuss how SA or MI can exacerbate this area of the grief cycle; how using substances can facilitate the escalation of their anger, thus increase their rage, depression, and general sense of despair over their loss/grief. Emphasize the importance for the client to continue their MI meds.

When anger begins to calm down, there is an attempt to bargain with 1) life, 2) ourselves, 3) another person, 4) God (I'll try harder to please...; Maybe if I had...; etc.) Bargaining in an attempt to postpone the inevitable; in an attempt to prevent it.

3. BARGAINING (Postponing the inevitable. Attempt to control the uncontrollable)
 - a. “What If's” and “If Only”
 - b. Desperate attempt to regain control

- c. Keeps you from facing reality
- d. Destructive if one gets stuck here.

Explore the irrational/delusion thinking of the What Ifs and If Onlys. Again explore for possible abuse of SA or MI in this stage. Engage client in ways they have seen themselves in this phase, if applicable. I.e. – if you give me back my license, I'll never drink again; If only I had taken my medicine they wouldn't have been angry and gotten into a wreck; etc.

When there is a realization that bargaining has not worked, the struggle to ward off reality, and the belief that the experience has been unfair – it begins – an overwhelming depression can take over. This is when the full force of the loss is experienced and is accompanied by crying, and intense emotional pain. Some feelings associated with this stage include feelings of being helpless, powerless, experiencing self-pity (why me?), sadness, guilt, suicidal thoughts, self-destructive or self-defeating behaviors (*abusing substances, stopping medications, or not using them as prescribed*)

4. DEPRESSION (Sorrow, Despair)

- a. Anger channeled back into self, turned inward against self.
- b. Response typically associated with grief but actually only one part of the whole process.
 - i. Tears, funerals, wakes allow you to be sad.
 - ii. Trapped (stuck) sorrow = self-pity leads to destructive behavior
 - iii. Can be immobilizing = total helplessness
 - iv. Crying is a good way to express sorrow. It washes away sadness. Heals. Is a sign of strength when used as part of the grieving process, but if stuck crying can become a chronic behavior, which does not effectively promote grieving.

Explore and process in depth any substance use. Discuss the effects of SA on depression and how this can amplify one's feelings with regard to feeling overwhelmed during this phase of the cycle.

Once you have cycled through the stages you enter a phase called ACCEPTANCE. Acceptance is not necessarily a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings. It is as if the pain is gone and the struggle is over. There is some peace, but it does not mean that healing is complete or the feelings of emptiness are gone.

At peace; Learning new coping skills; Accepting our past; Accepting life as it is; accepting our present circumstance; accepting our loss; Freeing ourselves to go on with life; Beginning to feel comfortable with life again; Adjusting; Setting new goals; May be striving for understanding of the loss; We're stopping avoiding issues associated with the loss or rumination about the loss.

5. ACCEPTANCE

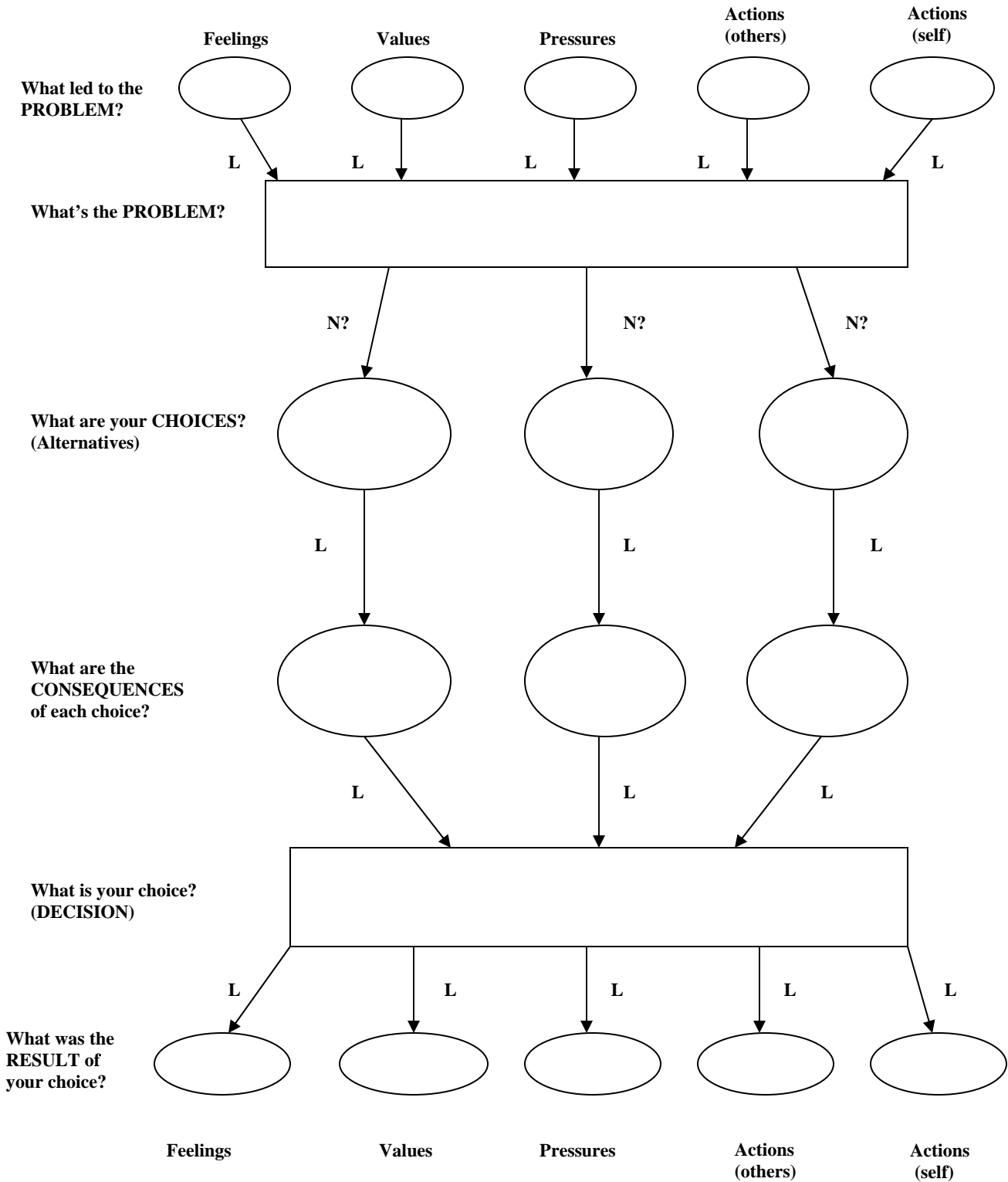
- a. Final goal with achieving resolution of grief.
- b. Belief that it is possible to heal and recover.
- c. Surrender to reality.

d. Recognition of responsibility = ACTION

REMEMBER: These stages do not occur in the same order for everyone. And you may find yourself cycling back and forth between stages until you have found some acceptance and resolve around the loss.

SEE EXERCISES ON FOLLOWING PAGES

PROBLEM MAP



This map was developed at the Rochester Institute of Technology by K.W. Chase, E. Rusling, and G. Long.

HISTORY OF LOSS GRAPH

On your graph write:

1. What happened
2. When did it happen

Below your graph write about:

1. How did it affect your life.
2. What issues do you now have to resolve.

EXAMPLE:

<u>Year</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1987</u>
Loss	Lost job	Father Died	Son went went off College	Spouse had an affair

YEAR

LOSS