

### Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 18 (May 18<sup>th</sup> /2021) Transitional Grief

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, KJ Thomas and Jillian Crabbe facilitated with guest speaker; Stefanie Lomatski, MSW, RSW who presented on Transitional Grief: A Continuum of Loss.

The pandemic has left the entire world with various losses. Grief is something we have all encountered at one point or another, but for many, grief has been more present in the last year. Whether you have lost a person you loved, or had a loss of the life you knew, understanding sadness through the lens of transitional grief can help you identify, and express what you are feeling.

You may have heard of the stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These are all emotions a person can go through after a loss. These emotions at times have been presented as linear, when in fact, they often can happen at different times, in different ways, in different orders. They can loop back around, and they don't always find a full resolve. In this bulletin we will talk about what we can do both for ourselves, and another when experiencing grief.

Grief is complex, because we often don't talk about it, our minds can tend to run from it. Grief can come with varying impacts of loss such as lower engagement with loved ones, fatigue, guilt, and stress. There are different types of grief and loss including:

*Anticipatory*- anticipating a loss. This can happen when a person is still alive and we are uncertain of an outcome, or know a poor outcome is inevitable.

*Ambiguous*- not specific to any one loss. The pandemic is an example of this, there have been many small losses happening at once (loss of people, work, lifestyles).

*Collective* –a situation where one loss is felt by many. Again, the pandemic is an example, or a natural disaster is another.

*Disenfranchised* – when a loss isn't recognized by people due to stigma, or a fear of triggering, or not knowing what to say.

#### Strategies for attending to our feelings of grief, and honouring loss:

- grief is a reflection of our attachments. It is normal to feel it, and healthy to acknowledge it with compassion.
- understanding that grief has no set path, it can twist and turn, and at times bring us in circles. Over time; however, the intensity of our emotions can begin to lessen.

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- in a society where happiness is always elevated, be conscious to honour other feelings. They are part of you as well and can help you grow. Allow room for conscious self-compassion, and self-nurturing.
- finding safe spaces to talk about what you are feeling. This can be a family member, friend, therapist, or group. Or, providing that safe space for a loved one to talk to you.
- avoid “toxic positivity”; statements like, “everything will be okay”. While hope is important, at times it can dismiss a person’s feelings, and miss opportunities to allow them to talk about and process their experience.
- decreasing uncertainty where possible in life. If there are areas you can step back from to reduce worry, allow yourself to do so. When worrying, ask yourself “Is this a current problem, or hypothetical?” If it is a current problem, create an action plan for it as this can help you gain some control over the worry.
- Be intentional when giving of yourself. Reflect on where time is spent, and how much energy it requires. While this can flux, we want to aim to have balance we can return to.
- Lean into the practice of where you give your energy. Try to monitor, as feelings like guilt can take up much space.
- Be aware of your own warning signs that indicate it’s time for connection, a break, or some form of self-care.

### Resources & Learning Material

- Toxic Positivity <https://youtu.be/-xA5xgAqj1l>
- Self Compassion <https://self-compassion.org/>
- Short Term Psychotherapy Support <https://www.theroyal.ca/PROMPT> or <https://walkincounselling.com/>
- Bereaved Families of Ottawa <https://bfo-ottawa.org/>