

Session # 6 - Lecture Discussion Outline

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief

Many participants will be familiar with these five stages which are often discussed in other phases of their treatment and recovery programs. This exercise leads participants to explore normal reactions to loss and grief in a fairly common and non-traumatic scenario – the possibility of losing one's purse or wallet.

1. Ask participants to imagine that they are driving on the freeway.
 - They are 15 minutes away from home and 20 minutes from their workplace or an important appointment.
 - They look down on the front seat and notice that their purse isn't there....(or check their jacket or pants pocket and notice that their wallet is missing.)
 - Ask, "What is your immediate response?" Point out that they would probably glance back at the highway and then look on the car seat or check the pocket again thinking it might actually be there. Not seeing it, they might still say or think, "Oh, No!" They'd probably look on the floor and under any items on the front seat thinking it will be found somewhere there.
 - These immediate responses (not accepting that the purse/wallet may be missing) are examples of Denial.

Write DENIAL on a flip chart.

2. Ask, "What happens next?"
 - Point out that they may say a swear word as the possibility sinks in that the purse/wallet may actually be gone.
 - They may begin to project being further embarrassed by having to turn around and get it, be late, borrow money for gas or lunch, etc.
 - Their anger might escalate if they think the purse/wallet may have been stolen.
 - They may begin to mentally "fix blame" for the incident: On themselves for being incompetent, on somebody who kept them up late the night before causing them to oversleep and leave in a hurry, on the cat who ran into the house at the last minute, on a child who distracted them, etc. etc. etc.

Write ANGER on the flip chart.

3. Ask, "What happens next?"
 - The person might think of a prayer or a promise, "Oh if it's really in the car or even safe at home I'll be more organized and I'll never leave the house late again as long as I live."
 - "Oh, I'll be eternally grateful if it's been stolen and the thief only took the cash and left the rest of the ID and credit cards behind."
 - "It's got to be somewhere! I'll go to church every Sunday and never be a grouch with the family again if I can just find it."
 - The person will probably keep an image of the lost purse/wallet in his mind's eye and try as hard as possible to remember where it was last seen.

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- She might begin looking again every place where it could be...looking repeatedly and compulsively. At this point it's helpful to remind participants how we normally go back and look again and again for lost glasses, the missing shoe, etc.
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At some point the person may begin to accept that the purse/wallet may actually not be in the front of the car. They may begin to problem solve: pull over, check in the back seat, check other pockets, look in the trunk of the car, call home, etc. If it's found, the episode stops here, except perhaps to be remembered as an amusing story or slight inconvenience.

If, on the other hand, this relatively minor incident follows a series of losses or stressful events, it could trigger a crisis on it's own. A person could consider it evidence of being in hopeless circumstances, always incompetent and a victim and over-react with anger or depression, go home and cry and go to bed for the rest of the day.

Write **BARGAINING** on the flip chart.

4. Ask, "If it's not found, what happens next?"
 - This is the beginning of acceptance that the lost item is really gone-and the beginning of problem solving regarding it's possible loss.
 - The person might feel momentary helplessness, sadness, and hopelessness.
 - He/she may begin to mourn irreplaceable lost items-children's pictures, etc.
 - The person may feel somewhat defeated and resigned to his fate as he decides to go home or to the last place where the purse/wallet might be found, to continue and ask to borrow money from a friend for lunch, etc.

Write **DEPRESSION** on the flip chart.

5. Say, "As the person recognizes that the purse/wallet is gone, problem solving proceeds in earnest. What happens next?"
 - The person might begin to review what must be done if the purse/wallet is gone: renew drivers' license, cancel credit and checking account, replace other items.
 - The person might make realistic plans to prevent loss or forgetting of the purse/wallet again.

Write **ACCEPTANCE** on the flip chart.

6. Briefly review how people who have endured a serious loss such as the death of a loved one experience these steps.
7. Review how they are expressed in the "loss" of addictive patterns in addiction and recovery process.
8. Indicate that children experience the same thoughts, feelings and behaviors and introduce the expanded description of childhood grief outlined in Claudia Jewett's work.

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