

SESSION 3: GRIEVING LOSS

What have you lost as a result of the trauma in your life? How do you grieve for what is lost and restore what can be regained?



INTRODUCTIONS

Please share your name again and tell us about the picture you brought or created of yourself from before the traumatic event(s). If you did not bring a picture or description, please tell us about what you would have brought.

- *In your description, please tell us why this picture is special to you and tell us about the characteristics, personality, and emotions that would best describe you in this picture.*

BEHIND THE SCENES

Life can change dramatically and irreversibly in one traumatic event or a series of repeated traumatic events. In many ways, life may never be as it was. At the same time, the essence of a person remains, is often frustrated and buried beneath the layers of grief, loss, and recovery. This chapter will focus on recognizing what was lost—physically, emotionally, and psychologically—from trauma then reclaiming what can be restored and grieving what may be lost forever.

MOVIE CLIP – Play Session 3: Grieving Loss

As you watch this clip, think about what Brooks and Leslie lost because of the trauma in their lives.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

[First, write responses to the questions below (*think*), then share your responses with a partner (*pair*), then discuss the questions as a group (*share*):

- 1) In the movie, what did Brooks and Leslie lose as result of the crime? (Loss can include people, possessions, relationships, physical and emotional health, personality characteristics, money, employment, etc.)
 - a. What did Brooks lose as a result of the traumatic event?
 - b. What did Leslie lose as a result of the traumatic event?
- 2) When you think about your own life, how has your life changed since your traumatic experience?
 - a. Physical losses (can include physical injury or limitations):
 - b. Relationship losses (can include loved ones with whom your relationship changed or ended):
 - c. Psychological/emotional losses (can include aspects of your personality or state of mind that changed after the event(s)):
 - d. Financial losses (can include possessions, money, and/or employment that was affected by the event(s)):
 - e. Other losses:

- 3) Of the losses you listed in question #2, which do you think you could realistically regain with additional help and effort?

- 4) Of the losses you listed in question #2, which do you think may be lost forever and why?

CLASS DISCUSSION

How do we restore what was lost? How do we grieve what cannot be restored? Psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross dedicated much of her life to understanding and empathizing with people facing death or loss. In 1969, she initially identified the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages have continued to resonate with children and adults who have faced all forms of loss ranging from health to employment, relationships and recovery³.

Question:

- **How have you grieved for what you have lost? Where do you feel you are within the five stages of grief now?** (Check all that apply. The stages can occur in any order.)
 - ☐ **Denial** — "I feel fine."; "I'm O.K." "This can't be happening to me."

 - ☐ **Anger** — "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "I blame _____."

 - ☐ **Bargaining** — "I'll do anything for _____."; "I will _____ if _____"

 - ☐ **Depression** — "I'm so sad. Why keep trying?"; "I miss my loved one. Why go on?"; "I'm so alone. No one understands me."

 - ☐ **Acceptance** — "It's going to be okay."; "This is not the road I would have chosen, but I will do the best I can with it."

- **What has helped you overcome any of these stages of grief?**

One person read aloud, then discuss as a group: **What can you relate to?**

What do you miss most from your life before the crime? How have you grieved?



FROM BROOKS: What I miss most is the time that I had with my parents, having them at the big events in my life or having my dad to go to for advice. I remember in the first year [after the crime], I would have these dreams where I would walk outside to my car and I'd look across the hood and my dad would be standing there. He would say, "Get in, let's talk." So I would just be driving around and... [Brooks stops, and begins to cry] ...I could talk to him about things that were happening and just get his advice. He always seemed to know the right thing to do. He knew what to tell me. We would just drive around and talk. I miss that.

I miss them at the holidays. I wish that [my wife] and our kids had gotten to know them. I think Leslie has missed out on a lot. I think she and her kids could have really benefited from having them around. I wish they had been there when I finished college or when I was sworn into the Senate. And I miss them being part of my everyday life. When they died, the financial support and emotional support all went away. I had to borrow my way through college. There is nothing about them that I don't miss. I also have physical reminders every day of what happened, seeing the scars around my side.

I think I still do grieve losing them. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about them, at least for a moment, particularly at the holidays and major events. It's tough. I hope that they can see what's happening, and I suspect that they do, but I wish they were there to share it and that I could see them really enjoying it.

There were times when going to their gravesite helped. I remember the first time I went to their grave. It was so cold, so sad, and I just thought about them being cold. I just wanted to throw a blanket over them to try to keep them warm. But, that was then, and I think there are instances as time goes on that it's better to not go. There was a time when I needed that more, and now it's not healthy. Sometimes it may be just to go back, but it just kind of keeps me in that place that isn't moving forward. And I know they are not there; they're in a better place. They are where they wanted to be, at the place they told the world about.

I don't know that we grieve for the people that we've lost. I think we grieve more for ourselves. It becomes a whole bag of emotions—positive and negative. As time goes by and you add more positive experiences to your life, it really helps us to not need to grieve so much.

HOMEWORK

As Brooks said, part of his road to recovery required putting as many good memories as he could between himself and the traumatic event. One of the effects of PTSD is that it can inhibit the pleasure centers in the brain and make it harder to experience happiness. This session's homework focuses on recognizing the daily steps you are taking toward healing.

Handout 2.1: Rediscovering What Was Lost asks you to keep track of life's simple pleasures and accomplishments over the next seven days. This is a daily log so please start on this tomorrow.

The second handout, *Handout 2.2: Grieving What Was Lost*, is about furthering the stages of grief. Write a letter to a person or aspect of your life that you miss from your life before trauma.

HANDOUT 3.1: REDISCOVERING WHAT WAS LOST

This week's homework will focus on recognizing the gains—large or small—you've made daily since the traumatic event(s). For the next seven days, please mark how many times you experience each of the following on that day. There is space at the bottom to add additional categories that are important to you and reflect your goals for this class. The extra categories may be related to relationships, work, physical habits or health, or other aspects that are important to your recovery process.

Begin the journal on whatever day tomorrow is (example: Weds.) and fill in answers for each day of the week.

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	TOTAL
<i>Sample</i>	II	I		III	I		II	9
Smiled earnestly								
Laughed out loud								
Talked to a friend (for more than 5 minutes)								
Talked to a family member (for more than 5 minutes)								
Slept well								
Did something you were proud of								
ADDITIONAL GOALS: (add any goals below that are meaningful to you)								
Work/home:								
Relationships:								
Health/Well-being:								
Other:								

HANDOUT 3.2: GRIEVING WHAT WAS LOST

Think back on your answer to question #4, “Of the losses you listed in question #2, which do you think may be lost forever?” What have you lost that you feel may be irrecoverable? What do you miss from your life before the traumatic event(s)? Use the space below to speak to your losses. It can be addressed to a person (example: Dear Alex...) or a part of yourself (example: Dear Happy, Carefree Self...) or some other aspect of your life that you miss.

Use additional pieces of paper if you have more than one person/aspect you want to address.

Dear _____,

I miss you...