CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Grief & Loss: The Ones We Acknowledge and The Ones We Don't

"Grief is really just love. It's all the love you want to give but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go" JAMIE ANDERSON

Throughout our lives and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities experienced considerable losses. Losses trigger grief: an intense emotional experience that is a normal and automatic response to losing anything that we value. Related to loss, grief is an internal process that involves feelings, emotions, and behaviors that are unique and healthy expression of love. It is so important to preserve the dignity of grief and grieving, which can sometimes take a lifetime.

Some losses that can trigger grief are easily recognized by society and ourselves. These include things like death of a loved one, a break-up, or loss of a job. However, there are other losses that do not always fit into the norms of what our society may identify as worthy of grief. Examples of these kinds of losses include: miscarriages; a decline in health; separation of families through immigration; an adoption that doesn't go through; infertility; loss of a loved one by suicide; living while a loved one is incarcerated; or a loss of cognitive functioning through things like dementia. Children can experience unique unrecognized losses, such as loss of connections with teachers, peers, and other meaningful adults in their lives when school is canceled or interrupted. These and other losses are called "unrecognized losses."

Even though often unrecognized, these losses can be just as detrimental to our mental health and overall well-being. Those of us who experience grief from these unrecognized losses may get more judgment and stigma from others, which can result in our increased isolation and disconnection from the very support systems that could mitigate the impact of these losses

Grief itself impacts our whole being—physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Experiencing recognized and unrecognized losses of any kind can leave us with a range of emotions, including anger, despair, depression, confusion, frustration, exhaustion, loneliness and anxiety. While grieving, we can also experience trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, a lack of motivation, fatigue, despair, aggression and/or difficulty connecting or re-engaging with others after the loss. If left unaddressed, there may be long-term disruptions in our ability to complete daily tasks related to school, work, or home.

While loss is a shared human experience, losses don't impact each of us in the same way. It is important to remember that grief is not a linear process with predictable stages that you can work through. Instead, grief is more like a spiral where you go in and out of stages more than once. Not only are we impacted differently by loss, but there is also lots of variation in our expressions of grief across genders, races, classes, religions, ages, and cultures. Therefore, cultural ways of expressing grief, as well as the developmental impact of grief on children and youth should be incorporated into tools and resources that support individuals experiencing recognized and unrecognized losses.

And some communities experience increased risk and vulnerability for certain types of losses, which create and reinforce social, economic, health and wealth disparities. These kinds of losses can include death of a loved one by gun violence, loss of contact with a family member through deportation, inability to travel to your home country to grieve with family after a loss, and not being able to openly love a life partner because of homophobia.

Though grief can be overwhelming, we can remember the words of Jamie Anderson: *Grief is just love with no place to go.* Our love—even when that love is in the shape of grief—can hold us as we mourn our recognized and unrecognized losses. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.