

Loss and Grief during a Pandemic

Session Plan

Session	Loss and Grief during a Pandemic
Background Information	The disruption and impact of the global COVID pandemic affected us all in some way or other and left us to deal with a tsunami of emotions from anger, anxiety, fear and denial, emotions often associated with grief. Grief is a natural response and affects people in different ways. Most people grieve when they lose something or someone important to them. The way grief affects us depends on a range of factors, including what kind of loss has been suffered, beliefs, religion, age, relationships and our physical and mental health. Grief can affect our mental health and for those experiencing mental health problems grief can worsen the symptoms. The lockdown measures restricted our movements and freedom to connect with our social supports in the ways that we might normally. For those grieving this proved to be extremely challenging as more often than not we cope with the help of family, friends, work colleagues and our wider social connections such as religious and spiritual gatherings, clubs and other activities. Keeping routines is one of the many ways in which people cope with grief and this was difficult to do as our day to day lives have changed significantly during the pandemic. As a result, the pandemic transformed lives unimaginably, affecting many people in different ways, with many experiencing loss in its widest sense, not only bereavement.
Aim	To raise awareness of loss and grief that can be experienced as a result of a pandemic and the impact on mental health and wellbeing.
Learning Outcomes	Participants will be able to 1. Dispel some of the myths surrounding loss and grief 2. List the different types of losses experienced as a result of the pandemic 3. Describe what grief is 4. Describe the impact grief can have on mental health and wellbeing 5. Discuss the different ways in which people grieve 6. Explore strategies and resources to support and manage loss and grief.
Duration	• 1.5 hours (can be adapted to be less)
Resources	• IT • Quiz • Presentation • Flipchart/pens • Session handouts • Evaluation

Learning outcomes	Participant Activity	Resources	Time
1. Dispel some of the myths surrounding loss and grief	Myth buster	Quiz	10 min
2. List examples of different types of losses experienced as a result of the pandemic	Losses during a pandemic	Flipchart/Pens Slide	10 min
3. Describe what grief is	Discussion	Slide	10min
4. Describe the impact grief can have on mental health and wellbeing	Body Map	Flipchart/Pens Slide	15 min
5. Discuss the different ways in which people grieve	Discussion	Slides	15 min
6. Explore strategies and resources to support loss and grief as a result of the pandemic	Managing grief	Slide	20 min
7. Looking after our mental health	Self-care	Slide	5 min
8. Reflection and session close	Evaluation	Evaluation tool	5 min

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Facilitator notes

Slide	Notes	Time	Resources
1	Welcome participants to the Loss and Grief in response to a pandemic session. Introduce yourself and have the title slide up and visible whilst doing this.	5 min	Slides
Session overview and context	Inform the participants that the session will look at: • Loss experienced as a result of a pandemic • The impact of loss and grief as a result of a pandemic • Different styles of grieving • Resources and support • Looking after yourself Emphasise this session is not to make participants experts on loss and grief but to raise awareness of loss and grief that has been experienced as a result of the pandemic and the impact on mental health and wellbeing. Keeping safe Reinforce this is a basic awareness session and does not allow for detailed discussion. If you are concerned about a participant's mental health and wellbeing and feel they may be in distress, their Doctor should be their first point of contact. If you feel the person's life is in immediate danger please call 999 for assistance. Online delivery Please refer to the Healthy Minds Online Guidance if you are facilitating a session online. Give an overview of the pandemic and the situation we found ourselves in. Example overview Throughout history nothing has killed human beings more than infectious diseases, think		

	about it tuberculosis for example. COVID-19 is a prime example and reminds us of how vulnerable we are and remain to be. We found ourselves in the grip of a global pandemic and life as we knew it transformed unimaginably. Everyday life was disrupted and we are now living with the unknown and uncertainty of what the future holds. Globally millions have lost their lives leaving individuals, families, communities and society in the grips of grief. Loss and grief are universal human experiences and we know that grief can be wider than bereavement. Most people grieve when they lose someone or something that is important to them. We will all have experienced loss and grief to some degree during the pandemic. This session provides an opportunity to explore some of the losses that have been experienced as a result of the pandemic, the impact on mental health and wellbeing and what supports and resources are available to help cope with the grief following the aftermath and fall out of the pandemic. Remind participants this is basic awareness session and does not offer the platform to discuss grief in detail or personal experiences. Ask participants to keep themselves safe and only share what they are comfortable with throughout the session and keep examples anonymous.		
Activity	Loss and Grief Quiz Group or individual activity First all of let's start with looking at some of the myths that can often surround loss and grief. Start with the quiz. This is a good starting point and gives an insight into the participant's knowledge and attitudes to loss and grief. This can be done as a group or as an individual activity. Once completed go through each of the questions and take feedback from the participants then share the answer. Discussion point: once all questions have	10 min (5 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Quiz

	been discussed, ask the participants if there were any surprises? Share that this activity helps challenge some of the myths associated with loss and grief.		
Activity & 2	What are some of the losses people have experienced as a result of the pandemic? Do not put the slide up until the activity has been completed Group or Individual Activity Now are we are going to explore some of the losses that individuals, families, communities and the wider society have experienced as a result of the pandemic. Think about this across the life course, so from pregnancy through to older adults. Once completed, ask participants to share one or two examples. Now put up the slide with some examples of losses across the life course. Acknowledge the examples that the participants have covered and those that have not been highlighted on the slide. Share the list is not exhaustive. Discussion point: ask the participants what they think this activity demonstrates? Did they think of loss in the wider sense and not just bereavement when completing this? It shows that loss is part of life, we all experience it. Some of us may experience more than others but we all experience it to some extent. Summarise by saying that grief can be wider than bereavement, death isn't the only loss that we can grieve and this pandemic has shown the breadth of losses that can be experienced.	15 min (10 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Slide Flipchart/Pens
3	What is grief? Do not put the slide up until you have put engaged in discussion and gathered some feedback. Discussion point: ask the participants to think of and jot down what emotions/feelings we can experience when we lose something or someone that is important to us?	10 min	Slide

	Examples of responses will include: • Sad • Angry • Guilty • Relieved • Devastated A whole range of emotions will be given. Don't spend a lot of time on this activity. Only take a few examples as this will be explored more in the next activity: how does grief affect us. Inform the participants that this emotional response is called grief. Now put up the grief slide and read off the information. Highlight that grief isn't only associated with bereavement, we can go through a grief process following any loss. Highlight some of the examples from the pandemic exercise completed at the beginning of the session. For example unemployment, school transitions, exams, social connections. Grief is an intense emotional response. Remind the participants that we have been living through unprecedented times, life as we know it has changed unimaginably. We have been on an emotional rollercoaster and may be questioning what is wrong with me. This is a normal response to the situation that we found ourselves in. Think of it as sane response to an insane situation. Our grief response can be dependent on various factors such as what kind of loss has been suffered, beliefs, religion, age, relationships and our physical and mental health. Often one loss can trigger a ripple effect of losses eg loss of job could lead to loss of home, independence, social connections and marriage etc. Finish by saying grief is a very personal and individual experience. People grieve in different ways, there is no "right or wrong way" to grieve and we will look at different styles of grieving later on in the session.		
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Activity	How does grief affect us? Group Activity Now we are going to look at how grief can affect us. Put participants into groups. Invite the participants to think about the effect the grief response can have on our bodies, think of all the losses we discussed at the beginning of the session, and how that may affect us. Consider the mental, emotional, spiritual social and physical effects it can have on our body. Take feedback from each group. Acknowledge the participants responses and that these are examples of how the grief response can affect our bodies. Some of examples of how grief can affect the body, this list is not exhaustive: • Withdrawn • Exhausted/Lack of energy • Difficulty concentrating • Sleep (too little/much) • Forgetfulness • Low Mood • Anxious • Agitated • Irritable Highlight that grief can affect the mind and body and it can go hand in hand with a wide range of physical and mental effects. Discussion point: ask participants what they think this activity shows? Highlight that although the responses may appear extreme, this is a natural response to grief and we are not losing our minds. Conclude that grief response will subside over time. We survive grief but life as we know it will never be the same again. Over time most people adjust to the loss and reinvest their energy back into activities, new employment, new home and relationships etc. This applies to the grief experience due to the pandemic. Please share with participants that this is not always the case and prolonged grief	15 min (10 min, 5 min feedback)	Slide Flipchart Pens
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	can be complicated and this session does not offer the opportunity to explore or discuss this. Complicated grief is symptoms that last longer than 12 months		
4	Different styles of grieving We have looked at the different losses experienced as a result of the pandemic, what grief is and how it can affect us. Discussion point: Ask participants if they think our grief responses are the same? Inform them that we are going to look at differently styles of grieving. As mentioned previously, grief is a unique and personal experience and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. When a loss occurs people may not express their reactions in the same way as others who may have experienced a similar loss. It is important that we have an understanding of the different ways of grieving as this can help us when it comes to supporting individuals and families and what may be helpful to support them through their grief journey. There are two different styles of grieving: Instrumental and Intuitive. However people can experience a blend of these and we will take a look at each one of these.	5 min	Slide
5	Instrumental Grieving Let's look at instrumental grieving: Put up the slide (discussion based). People who are instrumental grievers tend to be more private with this grief and less likely to show outward emotion. They tend to be more problem solving focused and direct their energies into activities eg, use their loss experience to have a positive outcome eg setting up support groups, campaigns etc.		Slide
6	Intuitive Grieving		Slide

	Put up the slide (discussion based) Then we have intuitive grievers. They tend to be more open and expressive with their grief emotions, they are more likely to talk about their feelings and share their stories with other. They will actively seek out support like talking therapies/support groups. Blended Grievers However you find that most people tend to experience a blend of these grieving styles but one style of grief is usually more dominant than the other. Remind participants that this is not about being an expert on grief but to help us recognise that we all grieve differently and our support needs may differ, what might be helpful to one may not be for another. One size does not fit all.		
Activity & 7	Managing Grief So now we are going to explore how we can manage grief experienced as a result of the pandemic and what might be helpful to support people who are grieving. Group Activity Suggested activity: Using some of the losses experienced as a result of the pandemic, death, bereavement, unemployment, social connections etc as headings, allocate each participant/group a heading and ask them to consider what might be useful to help support individuals mental health and wellbeing. Remind the participants to consider the different styles of grieving in this exercise recognising that people can grieve differently. Once complete, ask participants to share what loss they had and to give one or two examples of what might help support mental health. Once all participants have shared, put up the slide and use the information below to highlight some useful tips that can help us manage our grief:	20 min (15 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Slide Paper/Pen

	Recognise: and accept that it is ok to feel all the emotions we highlighted sad, guilty, angry etc. It's a healthy part of the grieving process. These emotions are ok to have, don't try and hide them or keep them contained. Keeping them contained will lead to problems. Time: grieving is an individual experience. Be kind to and patient with yourself, it takes time. Talking: to a supportive trusted adult: a friend, family member, support service can help deal with your emotions and begin the healing process. Keep routines: Try and keep routines in place during these times. This may be more difficult than normal but it helps give structure and focus at a time when everything feels chaotic. Still get up and go to bed at the same times you normally do etc. Look after yourself: Make time to do the things you enjoy. Eat a balanced diet and stay as active as you can. Alcohol: avoid misuse of alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and will make you feel worse once the effects wear off. *Increase in alcohol intake at home due to pandemic and lockdown measures* Let go: of what you can't control, focus on the, I can's and reinvest your energy here.		
8	When to get help? We have looked at different types of losses experienced as a result of the pandemic our reaction to loss which is known as grief, the impact that grief can have on our bodies, the different ways in which people grieve and what people need to help them through their grief journey. It is important to remember that grief is a natural response to something that has happened, however there is no instant fix and after time the grief is less likely to be at the forefront of our minds. Lots of people cope with grief with help and support from their	5 min	Slide Loss and Grief resources handout

	family and friends. However some people may require other supports such as service that provides counselling or group work. However there may be times when people need further help to support their mental health. Here are some things to consider, read the information off the slide. Remember grief is a very personal experience and people can have very different grief responses to similar losses. Circulate the resources handout. Facilitators may want to share local resource information.		
Activity & 9	Remind participants of the importance of looking after their mental health and provide a self-care activity.	5 min	Slide
Session Close	Thank the participants for their time and ask them to complete an evaluation.	5 min	Evaluation