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### Vital Questions to Ask A Griever

Grief is the normal and natural responses to the significant loss.

Grief is the difference between the intellectual knowledge of the loss event and the resistance to emotionally integrate the loss.

Emotional Integration: is the emotional processing of the unacceptable or intolerable intellectual facts of the loss.

The pain of grieving is proportional to the emotional investment of the lost relationship. Letting go of the pain does NOT equate being disloyal or betraying the loved one.

Our societies don't encourage grievers to talk about their deceased loved ones. In fact, we often steer grievers away in an effort to make them feel better. We want to invite our clients to talk about the ones who remain in their hearts.

Intake form includes:

Please describe any significant losses and any significant dates that have meaning for you.

This is an invitation for your clients to heighten their awareness of loss dates. This helps to identify possible date triggers for your clients that you can incorporate into the course of therapy.

Structure is beneficial for people who are grieving. Grievers feel quite lost, their world may be feeling quite different without their loved one in it. The shock of the end (even if it was anticipated in an illness) is usually experienced almost as an out of body sensation ("surreal") due to the unconscious expectation of seeing them again and the realization, over and over again, of the permanence of the loss. Everything looks different and the same simultaneously. There are specific questions that can be helpful to give structure and guidance to the intense experience of grief.

**Use empathic reflection while they are narrating the initial grief story.**

The importance of these questions:

1. The impact of the end of the relationship is overwhelming and often overshadows all else.
2. The events that led up to the end are usually being scrutinized by the griever's brain, looking for anything that may have been missed so as to have averted the event (which is impossible).
3. Don't ask WHY questions which feeds into the intellectual hunt in the brain to have averted the loss.

Questions:

What happened?

How did you find out? (How did you learn he/she/they had died?) (Where were you/what were you doing when you found out?)

- This is particularly important question to ask for sudden losses (i.e. suicide loss, overdose, murder, medical event such as fatal heart attack)
  - Suicide: for those who found the deceased
    - I don't have them go into details re finding the loved one at this time. There is the trauma of the impact of the discovery that needs to be acknowledged. The intrusive images often are haunting for the griever.

When did you realize the seriousness of the situation?

- The brain often goes to reviewing when the problem began in an unconscious attempt to "fix it" which of course we can't.

When did she/he/they realize the seriousness of the situation?

Were you able to talk with him/her/them about it (the illness/condition that led to the loved one's death)?

- Listen for the unsaid things the griever identifies
  - These are often either regrets, resentments or reminisces.

What was the length of the illness?

- Grief can sometimes begin when the illness became serious which may have been months/years prior (i.e. Dementia/Alzheimer's, cancer, depression, ...)
- The illness may have been prolonged with times of recovery (roller coaster) with the assumption for the family/friends to be shocked when their loved one died.
- The length of time between when the griever realized their loved one may die to the date of death may be perceived as agonizing long or way too brief (or both). "It happened gradually, then suddenly" *Ernest Hemingway*.

Did they have treatment? And were you involved in their treatment?

- Often families/friends may have unresolved feelings about their loved one's tx, and if they wished the tx was different, or if the tx was started sooner, later or was the "wrong" tx.
  - Sometimes grievors have to make medical decisions for their loved one that they may wish they could have changed.

What was your last conversation with him/her/them?

- The story may include regrets or resentments re what was said or not said
- The story may or may not include reminisces and gratitude for being able to express appreciation/letting their loved one how much they were loved.

Does anything stand out for you over the last few weeks/days/hours prior to their death?

Were you able to have a memorial/funeral/celebration of life for him/her/them? What stands out for you about that?

Do you have a picture of your loved one that you'd like to share?