

# Loss, Suffering and Grief

Foundations of Faith Community Nursing

Beth Peterson, DMin., MSN, RN

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Adapted from the Faith Community Nursing Course curriculum developed through the Westberg Institute for Faith Community Nursing, which is owned by the Spiritual Care Association, New York, NY

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Learning Outcomes

1. Define life issues and terms related to loss, suffering and grief.
2. Apply the basic tenets and theories related to suffering, grief and mourning in faith community nursing practice.
3. Engage in activities that support and facilitate the transition of life events for individuals in the faith community.
4. Apply the competencies of faith community nursing to professional development that supports working in the field of grief and loss.

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Outcome 1

Define life issues and terms related to loss, suffering and grief.

See Self Learning Packet

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4

### Outcome 2

Apply the basic tenets and theories related to suffering, grief and mourning in faith community nursing practice.

See Self Learning Packet

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5

### Outcome 3

Engage in activities that support and facilitate the transition of life events for individuals in the faith community.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6

### Small Group Discussions

1. Introduce yourself-name, where you're from, nursing specialty. (You can skip this if you already know this about each other.
2. Choose a facilitator (to keep the group moving and on time) and a recorder (to summarize group's discussion and present to the large group.
3. 7 minutes for small group discussion, 3 minutes total for all groups to report

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

7

### Small Group Discussion #1

1. Refer to the self learning packet.
2. Select one of the losses that you have experienced (and that you feel comfortable sharing). What did other people do that helped or didn't help?
3. Share with the group

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

8

"The single greatest gift a grieving person can receive is to be heard, to be given the opportunity to talk and talk and talk out the pain. Another gift is for someone simply to be there in the silence when there is nothing left to say...Our willingness to listen also quietly tells them that they are valued, their story is worth hearing, and we are genuinely interested." (Ronald Greer, Markings on the Windowsill)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

9

### The FCN Role in Communication

- Listening and making supportive and caring comments
- Serving as an advocate
- Serving as a compassionate voice
- Being culturally competent, respectful, and cognizant of the mourner's culture and spirituality

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

10

### Engaging on a Personal Level: Wolfelt's Model of Companionship (2012)

- Being present in another person's pain; not taking away the pain
- Listening with the heart, not analyzing with the head
- Bearing witness to the struggles of others; not judging or directing them
- Walking alongside, not leading

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

11

### Engaging on a Personal Level:

- Discovering the gift of sacred silence; being quiet in the moment.
- Respecting disorder and confusion; not imposing order and logic.
- Learning from others; not teaching them.
- Having a curiosity; not expertise.
- Paying attention to the experiences that give life richness and meaning.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

12

Case Study from Self Learning Packet

- Case Study: A member of your faith community asks to meet with you. She tells you that her husband died two years ago after a brief illness and that she is having a hard time with grief because her husband was verbally abusive to her their entire marriage. She feels guilty because she does not “miss him” as much as she thinks she should.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

13

Small Group Discussion #2

- How might you use Wolfeldt’s concept of companioning in order to engage with this woman on a personal level?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

14

The Role of Lament in Loss, Suffering, and Grief

- Lament is the process of acknowledging one’s pain and suffering and honestly and fearlessly placing that distress at the feet of God, and awaiting God’s response
- “How long O Lord must I call for help, but you did not listen...you did not save.”  
(Habakkuk 1:2)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

15

### Engaging in Lament

- Find a quiet place with God
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you
- Be in God’s presence
- Identify and write down the “through” circumstances in your life
- Offer these things to God
- Worship God

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

16

### Journaling

- Think of an experience in your life when you engaged in lament.
- What were your feelings?
- What was it like for you?
- What was the result or outcome?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

17

### COVID-19 and Grief

Characteristics and context of the COVID pandemic that make grief more complex

- Worldwide
- Unpredictable impact and course of illness
- Isolation and multiple losses
- Varied emotions: fear, anger, anxiety
- Cumulative grief

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

18

### COVID-19 and the Faith Community

- Restrictions on large gatherings
- Difficulty in providing face-to-face support
- Challenges in providing meaningful rituals, including funerals
- Differing beliefs about masks, social distancing, vaccinations

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

19

### FCN as Referral and Resource Agent

Provide validation that their struggles are real and normal

- Professional counseling
- Support groups
- Internet resources

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

20

### Outcome 4

Apply the competencies of faith community nursing to professional development that supports working in the field of grief and loss.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

21

### Reflective Learning

- Serves as a thoughtful self-assessment, analysis, and synthesis of one’s strengths and opportunities for improvement
- Self-evaluation of practice
- Setting goals and taking action to achieve goals

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

22

### Reflective Learning

- Reflecting on personal losses and coping to empathize with others and to maintain boundaries
- Periodically confer with and seek informal peer and ministry leader’s feedback on your practice and spiritual care.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

23

### Transference

- The conscious and unconscious feelings experienced by the patient toward the clinician
- May view the FCN as parent, sibling, friend

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

24

### Dealing with Transference

- Make sure role expectations are clear within the faith congregation
- Clarify role and availability of the FCN in first meeting with individual or family
- Maintain clear boundaries "I can't do that, but I can do this"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

25

### Countertransference

- The conscious and unconscious feelings experienced by the clinician toward the patient
- FCN may remind client of parent, friend, spouse, child, etc.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

26

### Dealing with Countertransference

- Recognize own motivation to work in the field of loss and grief.
- Consider "Whose needs are being met?"
- Recognize own responses in view of the patient's needs.
- Focus on listening skills and validating the patient's story.
- Respect patient's personal space and their level of comfort or discomfort

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

27

### Countertransference

- Avoid assuming burdens that are the responsibility of others (or at least are not solely yours)
- Make use of a counselor, trusted advisor to sort out your own responses

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

28

### Small Group Discussion #3

Think about how COVID-19 may have complicated the grief experience within your faith community using the handout *How the Covid-19 Pandemic May Contribute to Complicated Grief*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

29

- Part 1: Identify ways that COVID-19 may impact individuals in each of these age groups: school age children, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors. (If there's not enough time, select 2 or 3 groups)
- Part 2: List 1 or 2 things that you or your faith community might do to provide support for people in these age groups

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

30

Summary of FCN Roles in Responding to Grief and Loss

- Your presence is the most important thing you have to offer
- Don't come with an agenda or expectations
- Say little and engage in active listening and attentiveness
- Don't feel obligated to answer for or defend God
- Ask only the necessary assessment questions
- Plan for the next visit

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

31

Comments or Questions

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

32