



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 6
Session 9: The Significance of Holidays, Anniversaries, and Other Triggers of Grief in the African-American Community

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Ajita Robinson

Question from Jennifer Chiaramonti

Do you conduct a loss history informally or use a specific assessment tool?

Answer from Presenter

Great question. I use informal and formal assessments. Informal assessments can include open-ended questions that assess whether a loss is impacting the client's reason for coming in for treatment or if a loss impacts their daily functioning.

Formal assessments vary depending on the type of loss. A few scales that I use regularly are the Impact of Event Scale, the Inventory for Complicated Grief, Grief Intensity Scale.

Question from Leslie Contos

What kinds of advocacy projects might counselors encourage to support increased conversations around death and grief in African-American communities?

Answer from Presenter

The best advocacy is talking about grief. Normalizing that grief is a normal and natural part of life. Increasing knowledge and aware about the different types of losses (physical and symbolic) and the notion that although grief is universal, the journey is unique to each of us.

Question from Chelsea Fowler

Do you ever do EMDR with frozen grief?

Answer from Presenter

I am not trained in EMDR at this time. However, there is research to support the effectiveness of EMDR in trauma related grief.

Question from Brittney Harris

What are some ways to work through stigma's regarding depression and grief in individual therapy?



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Answer from Presenter

It is important to explain that grief and clinical depression. Grief has many of the same symptoms of depression that don't meet the criterion for clinical depression. It is important to note that if a client is presenting with clinical depression that needs to be treated separate from the grief.

Question from Wen-Chien Lin

Could you talk a little bit more about using Narrative Therapy in grief counseling?

Answer from Presenter

An important part of the healing process in grief work is meaning making. Prior to this stage in the process clients often need to process what happened, the nature of the loss. In many cultures, storytelling is both empowering and healing. Narrative therapy is an important and effective tool in grief work because it allows the client (and clinician) to more fully understand the loss in the client's words and world. It allows the client to also re-write their narrative as it relates to the loss. Narrative re-construction is also a meaning-making process that can help the bereaved situated their loved one in the present in the absence of their physical being.

Question from Pamela Linn

How important is it to the process of healing to have a therapist from the community?

Answer from Presenter

Having a therapist who is trained in grief work is important. Depending on the loss, particularly race-based loss and trauma, clients may be more comfortable accessing and utilizing therapy with an African American clinician. Many clients report that having an African American clinician allows them to "put down their armor" and just engage without having to worry about explaining certain things or being misunderstood. The therapeutic alliance can certainly be established with a therapist who isn't a POC, however, building trust will be crucial.

Question from Allen Vosburg

I found out how important research is with dealing with cultural diversity. I worked for some time with the Native American population. I wonder how you can keep your clients to be able to believe that you, the counselor, do care and just trying to keep the client thinking that you are not only doing your job.

Answer from Presenter

It is important to be mindful that building trust and rapport with clients varies depending on the client and the culture of origin. It is important to also be willing to accept feedback from clients if they are reporting a discrepancy between how you are perceived versus how you are intending to show up. Clients need consistency. Be consistent in your engagement, empathy and openness.

Question from Barry Wallace

What therapeutic modalities are recommended when working with clients who are experiencing complicated grief?

Answer from Presenter

Complicated grief requires special care and consideration. It is important to remember that grief doesn't resolve. The goal of grief work is to assist clients with coping with grief. A necessary aspect of working with clients with complicated grief includes a thorough and ongoing assessment of suicide risk and concomitant mood and anxiety disorders. Intervention should be individualized and often eclectic to include individual and group support. Structure and consistent support is most helpful. There are complicated grief therapy curricula that have proven effectiveness. Key components of grief work for this population includes space to process the loss and restore life post loss.

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