



LEADER'S GUIDE

Let's Talk About Loss comprises three sessions:

1. Loss, Death and Growth
2. Bereavement and Recovery
3. Rituals, Untimely Deaths and Facing Death with Faith

IMPORTANT

Please do not share the links to these videos with individuals. The sessions are designed for use within a group setting only. Also, the content is really only suitable for those who have experienced bereavement longer than three months. Please be aware of the stage of grief that participants are at. You can recommend that the recently bereaved attend sessions later. Please also make sure you have all the session materials to hand.

Welcome the group to the session and start the video. Do PAUSE THE VIDEO when I ask and do take time to introduce yourself to the group. Give your name and share one interesting fact about yourself, maybe your favourite colour, favourite place or favourite music! Participants may feel anxious about being in the group, they may be nervous about speaking out loud in a group setting. You could write on a **white board** or **flip chart** the words “favourite colour, favourite place or favourite music,” as some may be so anxious that they forget what I instructed them to do! Take your time. It’s important that everyone gets to share. Allow about 12 minutes for this, but don’t worry if it takes longer.

Restart the video. I speak about the importance of confidentiality. When I ask, “Are we all okay with that?” try to make eye contact with each participant, confidentiality is crucial. On the video I pray, but feel free to pray yourself. You know your group and their needs best.

SESSION 1: LOSS, DEATH AND PERSONAL GROWTH

This first session is about loss in general, how we deal with and respond to it, and how loss can lead to growth. **You will need a flip chart or white board, photocopies of the True False Exercise on page 7 and pens or pencils.**

Each stage of development from birth to old age may bring a sense of loss:

- i. From the womb to birth there's a loss of security
- ii. From baby to child there's the loss of the right to demand attention
- iii. From child to adolescent there's a loss of security of identity
- iv. From adolescent to young adult there's the loss of the security of home
- v. From young adult to older adult there a loss of youthfulness

I introduce Linda Machin's book 'Working with Loss and Grief.' She suggests that 4 Things Help us to Grow:

1. Seeing grief as a natural process of healing and not a symptom of falling apart.
2. Understanding that tears, rage and anguish are ways of dispelling pain and promoting healing.
3. Discovering the emotional and spiritual strength that we have inside ourselves.
4. Receiving the love and support of others, which helps us to feel comforted, included and valued.

Do please emphasise the importance of releasing feelings – there is no progression without expression! Now we move to a pair share exercise to answer the question "What kind of growth should we look for in ourselves as a result of our loss?" PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. I ask participants to share in 2s or 3s the kind of growth we should look for as a result of our loss. Please don't stop the discussion too soon, but neither should you wait until the conversation becomes completely hushed. Allow 7-10 minutes for this, but give more time if pairs are in full flow. I ask if there is a spokesperson from each pair who would like to share their group's ideas. You don't need to say if you agree or disagree with the groups, simply thank participants for sharing.

RESTART the video and I will introduce the **True False Exercise**, or you can do this yourself. Distribute the photocopies you have made of page 7 and a pen or pencil. Ask participants to tick either the true or false box next to each statement. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 5-7 minutes for this. You can then take each statement in turn and discuss participant's answers. FALSE 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10; TRUE 3, 4, 7, 8. Be clear that there may be some statements which we disagree on, but this is okay.

PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 7-10 minutes for the discussion. Statements 4 and 6 usually cause disagreement. It is helpful if you have formed your own opinion on these and can share your reasons with the group. 4 is generally true providing it does not continue for years. 6 is generally false it's hard for the bereaved to go against community norms.

Each video session ends with a **Reflection**. It's important that you join in and model the relaxed, chilled out posture needed to allow Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 to minister to the group. Now STOP THE VIDEO and remind the group of the day, time and place of your next meeting.

SESSION 2: BEREAVEMENT AND RECOVERY

Be watchful for any new members joining the group. Be careful not to include the recently bereaved in the session. As before I begin with prayer. You can fast forward this and lead the group in prayer yourself. **You will need sufficient green, red and orange cards for participants to have one of each colour.** Simply cut coloured, A4 sheets into 4. If you have a chatty group, cards are unnecessary.

I begin with a brief review of the last session. Because often the bereaved see no possible positive outcome from their loss, I ask the question “was anyone was cross, irritated, or even angry last time at Linda Machin’s suggestion that we can grow through loss?” Do PAUSE THE VIDEO here and allow time for anyone to share their feelings if they’d like to. I also ask if participants would like more time to talk about the **True False** statements and whether it is helpful to revisit special places we visited with our loved one who has died. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO and encourage the group to share their ideas and feelings. The extroverts in the group will usually have shared their thoughts at the time, but introverts, reflectors, may have needed space to gather their thoughts. When everyone has had an opportunity to speak, please emphasise that everyone’s journey through grief may be navigated differently.

This next piece introduces the Revd Doug Hiza’s work on the social and physical aspects of grief. I ask the question “Is the Revd Hiza right?” And with the use of coloured cards everyone has the opportunity to share if they experienced people avoiding them, felt awkward or isolated in their grief, or not. The point is that grief impacts us socially and physically. You know your group best, the cards encourage everyone to share, but you may have participants who will not need such help. Judge for yourself if the cards are helpful or not. There are psychological aspects of grief.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross: 5 Stages of Grief

1. Denial: the bereaved are initially in a state of shock, unable to believe the sad news.
2. Anger: at fate, God, or the NHS - anyone is a target for anger.
3. Bargaining: we make deals with God to get us out of our present pain.
4. Depression: thinking of what could/should have been, regret, negativity, hopelessness.
5. Acceptance: the realisation that our loved one's death is actually real.

Stages 2-4 are the most extreme stages. Looking at Elizabeth Kubler Ross's 5 Psychological Stages of Grief will take a bit of time. It is important to emphasise that these 5 stages are not neat and orderly, following one after the other. Several impacts may happen at the same time, or the bereaved swing from one stage to the other and back again. It's called lily hopping - we hop from one stage to the other. Others hardly experience some stages at all. It is also worth noting that making progress through the stages does not happen automatically. The biggest myth about grief is that time heals everything.

Some psychologists suggest 7 Stages of Grief

1. Shock, numbness and disbelief
2. Denial
3. Bargaining
4. Guilt
5. Anger and irritability
6. Depression
7. Acceptance

You may or may not find it helpful to use the coloured cards as I talk the group through the 7 Stages of Grief. If participants are comfortable with each other they may open up easily when you ask, "Did anyone experience shock and disbelief when their loved one died?" Simply fast forward the video and ask the group: "Was anyone initially unable to believe news of the death?" "Did anyone try to bargain with God?" "Did anyone feel guilty for something said or done, or guilty that they are still alive when their loved one is dead?" "Was anyone angry at their loss?" You may also want to ask if anyone did not experience disbelief or did not try to bargain with God or wasn't angry. It is helpful to emphasise that these feelings are normal reactions to loss.

We are ready for another pair share where participants talk together about which of the stages they most readily identify with. Some will have experienced all stages but encourage the group to share the one stage that really impacted them. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow the group to share together in 2s or 3s. Give sufficient time for this, perhaps 10-12 minutes. You can then work around the room and ask each person if they wish to say what stage had the biggest impact on them. Tell the group that if they do not wish to share, they can just say ‘pass.’ Thank the group for being so honest and remind them that everything shared in the room is confidential and is not to be shared with others outside the room.

We finish the session with a Reflection on Psalm 91. Please do sit down, relax and join in. I close in prayer, but as before, please feel free to pray yourself.

SESSION 3: RITUALS, UNTIMELY DEATHS AND FACING DEATH WITH FAITH

I know this is repetitive, but before you jump into this final session do ensure that the recently bereaved have not joined your group. Also, it is really important that no one watches the videos alone, these are for group use only. **For this session you will need sheets of A4 paper on a clipboard and coloured pencils or felt-tip pens.** Sit the group around tables for the session if you don’t have clipboards.

As before, we begin with prayer and a review of the previous session. To allow the reflectors in the group an opportunity to share I ask “What thoughts stuck with them about the social, physical and psychological impact of grief? What was most helpful in the last session?” At this stage participants may feel free to put up a hand and share. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 15 minutes for this.

I give examples of community, faith and family rituals and traditions associated with grief and ask, “Are there other traditions or rituals that you have observed?” If someone wishes to share, PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 5 minutes for this.

Now hand out the A4 sheets of paper, clipboards and colouring pencils. I ask the group to draw whatever comes to their mind when they think about the word ‘death.’ PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 5 minutes for this. I then ask, “What does your picture mean to you? What does it say about your view of death? Why did you use the colours you did?” Check if anyone in the group would like to share PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow 12-15 minutes for this.

There are usually 3 types of drawing representing the three ways we tend to speak about death: a concrete image, a passageway, or a theological image. Some pictures fall into more than one category. I talk the group through these images and the code words we use when we speak of death! I ask participants to note reasons why they think we do not use the words dying, dead or death. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO.

Allow 3-5 minutes for the group to think this through. I will give some reasons when you restart your video. We then have another pair share session to discuss the themes in the participants' pictures of death. I ask a number of questions for discussion and ask groups to choose a spokesperson to feed back answers to the group. PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO. Allow about 12-15 minutes for this. Please don't rush this!

This final session focuses on Christian hope and the spiritualist practices that are condemned in Scripture. We conclude with a reflection on Isaiah 43:1b-3a. Please sit down and join in with the group, then close in prayer. I have listed some helpful resources here, which you may wish to share with the group.

Useful Books

- C. S. Lewis. 'A Grief Observed' Faber and Faber: London, 1966.
Alain Emerson. 'Luminous Dark: Leaning into Pain, Holding on to God, Breaking Through into Light.' Muddy Pearl: Edinburgh, 2017.

Useful Contacts

- Church's Ministry of Healing: 07842 925433; 162 Upper Knockbreda Road, Belfast BT6 9QF.
CRUSE Bereavement Care: (028) 9043 4600; 10 College Green, Belfast BT7 1LN.

TRUE FALSE EXERCISE

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Mourners who feel strong emotions of grief should try to suppress them		
2. It is best for the mental health of the recently bereaved not to speak of the deceased		
3. Some mourners experience psychologically caused symptoms such as physical pains and distress many months after the death of a loved one		
4. Mourners who were accustomed to visiting certain places together with their partners should continue to do so in order to relieve their grief		
5. A spouse who dates less than a year after bereavement was probably not too fond of their partner		
6. Anyone who dislikes commonly accepted practices during mourning, like wearing dark clothes, should ignore them		
7. A bereaved person who feels depressed should say so to their friends		
8. Even a happily married person may experience moments of guilt, or resentment towards their deceased spouse		
9. A person who does no weeping is generally healthier emotionally than one who weeps a great deal		
10. Relatives and friends should discourage the bereaved from weeping		