

Module IV—Grief, Loss and Bereavement

Loss Activity

Narrative for Instructor

Note: This exercise may precipitate participants becoming emotional. Please let them know they may be excused if this happens. The exercise is to allow individuals to explore their own personal feelings about dying. It can also give insight about what our patients experience as we care for them through the end of life journey.

Directions: Write down eight things/items/people/values that are most important to you.

Pretend this is a story about you. Give thought to how you would be feeling if this were to happen to you.

On a Sunday morning in September after several weeks of nausea and vomiting and pain you ended up in the Emergency Room. You had fought it thinking you just had some bad bug and that was causing your problems.

Cross off 1

The ER doctor orders a lot of lab work and an ultrasound. You make it through these tests and then you are released to go home. Your liver enzymes were up; your liver was enlarged and painful to touch. You also had a spot on your lung.

You have to meet with the general surgeon and oncologist next week. Well there goes your sleep at least until you can meet with them and find out what is really going on. You try to concentrate on your work this week while you wait but find it hard to do. You thought, this week will seem like an eternity, and it did.”

Cross off 1

The oncologist and surgeon discussed your case with you and your spouse and decided they needed to do an MRI and biopsy the liver. However, you won't get any results for 3-4 days. Another wait and see and yes another week-end of worry and sleepless nights, not to mention the pain. This waiting game is about to drive you insane.

Your nausea and vomiting are gone since you got some medicine for it, so maybe that means it is not really bad. You continue to be unable to eat and lost 10 pounds over last month. You are thinking, “Needed to lose the pounds, but wouldn't have chosen to do it this way.”

Cross off 1

The next week-end you and your family make your annual trip to see the beautiful leaves in the mountains. You continue to worry, but also continue to deny there was anything bad going on with your health. Yet in the back of your mind you are thinking this will probably be my last annual trip to the mountains.

Cross off 1

On Monday you get a call from the Oncologist and she wanted to see you that afternoon. You were a basket case by then. All you could think was, "it has to be bad news or she would have given me the results on the phone. You fall apart at work, crying and have to leave early to try to get yourself back together and arrange for your spouse to go with you to the doctor. You are scared, sad and angry all at the same time!

You were diagnosed with Liver Cancer and the one small spot on your lung that turned out to be nothing. As you leave the office, you realize you have just gotten your death sentence.

Cross off 1

You start Chemo and Radiation the next week and there was no change in the size of the tumor at the next check. The chemo made you sick again and all your hair started falling out. You really wanted to isolate yourself now with these bald spots in your head. Oh well, you thought, "I can get a wig, but it really doesn't matter anyway, I am dying."

Cross off 2

You completed your treatment regimen and returned to the doctor for a follow up. You were getting sicker instead of better. After additional tests, they found the cancer had spread to your brain and bones. No wonder you are in so much pain every time you move. And the headaches were unbearable.

After three weeks, the pain was so intense that you could hardly stand it. You stopped eating. You had to take so much pain medication that everything was a blur. You slept more than you were awake. You take to the bed and stay. You could hear people talking but could not respond as family members who never visited your house are visiting now. Your breathing became labored and fast. Your breaths begin to get more shallow and you slip into a deep sleep, never to wake on this earth again.

Cross off 1

Now, take a deep breath. You are alive and well. I would like you to think about this exercise- the thoughts and feelings you had as you had to give up valued items that you have in your life. Think about what is important and the things you had problems giving up.

Questions for Group discussion

1. How did it make you feel?
2. What were some of your thoughts as you went through the exercise?
3. What type of things did you keep the longest? Why?