

Talking to Clients About Grief and Loss During Difficult Times

Talking with your clients about feelings of grief and loss right now is important because during this time, many clients are experiencing several kinds of loss and changes in their lives. Feelings of grief include sadness, anger, numbness, and decreased ability to function on a day-to-day basis. The purpose of talking clients about their experiences with grief is not to function as a mental health specialist. Instead, it is to break down the wall of silence around grief, be present, and actively listen to your client's thought and feelings and facilitate discussion on what clients can do to help with their grief and make sure they have support if they need it. You can use the steps below to have this conversation with clients. Remember to **normalize** the client's feelings and avoid using clichés. **Active listening** and simply being present, even in silence, can be the most supportive gesture you can offer.

Check in With Yourself

Before engaging with the client, check in with yourself. Ask yourself:

1. How am I doing with my own losses?
2. What is my reaction when I think about talking to someone about grief?

Step 1: Introduce

Introduce the topic to the client.

- *"Right now, many people are experiencing loss and are feeling sad, angry, anxious, or numb."*
- *"I am talking to all my clients about this – can I ask you a few questions?"*

Step 2: Explore

Explore the client's feeling and experiences around grief and loss.

- *"Tell me about the changes and losses you've been experiencing in your day-to-day life."*
- Normalize – *"A lot of people are feeling..."*
- Actively listen – *"It sounds like..."*

Step 3: Discuss Strategies

Discuss strategies to address grief and loss.

- *"What sorts of things or resources could help you cope? Who could you lean on?"*
- *"Would it be okay if I shared some things people have found helpful?"*

Step 4: Identify an Action Step

Identify next steps together with the client.

- Make sure that clients who need a referral get one and check in with clients more frequently
- Follow your agency's protocol for mental health counseling and support



Do's and Don'ts for Talking About Grief and Loss

Review the following do's and don't before talking to a client about grief and loss:

Do

Be silent, present, and patient
Give the client permission to grieve
Accept ALL feelings without judgement

Don't

Use cliché's or silver linings
Try to make the client think or feel positive things

Helpful Strategies for Addressing Grief and Loss

You can help clients consider:

- Talking to a grief counselor or supportive friend
- Bereavement groups
- Using their healthy coping toolbox
- Concrete support to help with daily functioning
- Journal writing