

Coaching People Through Grief

Lots of people are affected by the tragic events that are happening around the world especially the last explosion. We as coaches want and need to be involved to help certain people that are experiencing grief and pain. What is needed from us? How can we help? And what do we need to know before we start. This is what I am going to share with you today.

Before You Start

I need to shed the light on this before we start. You are not replacing a therapist. You are still the coach that is going to help a client reach their destination and go through the stages of grief. But the client needs to make a conscious decision to go on this journey and he or she need to set the agenda too.

Stages of Grief

People go through different stages of grief. There are generally 5. People who are grieving do not necessarily go through all of them or in the same order. But these stages are universal and experienced by people from all walks of life and across different cultures.

Individuals experience grief in cases like their terminal illness, loss of a loved one, or a tragic event... They spend different periods of time going through each stage and express each stage with different levels of intensity. They might express or hide their emotions. As a coach, you can play a role in helping people move through these stages. Let's go through these 5 stages of grief.

STAGE 1: Denial

In the light of the tragic events, we are in shock. We are unable to process or digest what happened. We live in denial. It's the start of the 5 stages of grief. In that stage you might experience an inability to think or act. A person might show willingness to resist the change and an inability to move forward.

Coaching Tip

Keep in mind that listening deeply will help your client move forward. Also, maybe sharing about a personal story about how being around other people helps since they might isolate themselves in that stage.

STAGE 2: Anger

When the effects of denial and isolation starts to fade away, reality and its pain re-emerge. We feel that we are not ready. And when we realize that, we start to experience fear of what lies ahead. In some cases, we experience anger. Anger can be expressed in different ways; some take it on themselves while some direct it to other people around them. You can expect those in this phase to remain frustrated, irritable and short tempered.

Coaching Tip

This stage can also be called “danger zone”, be careful during this stage. Be open, understanding and most of all don't take anything personal. Understand that this is a natural reaction during this time.

STAGE 3: Bargaining

Bargaining is a reaction to feelings like helplessness. You know you are in this stage when you start with the “if only” statements. Here are few examples, if only I had left earlier, if only I had sought medical attention sooner. By using these statements, we try to postpone the inevitable pain. Guilt often accompanies bargaining because we start to believe that there was something that we could have done that could have saved us or our loved ones.

Coaching Tip

Be open to suggestions, give them enough time to express and let it out. They might still resist to face the reality, or learn what is waiting for them.

STAGE 4: Depression

After the previous phase, you might start to feel extremely down. Understanding reality is not always a happy and comfortable place. Our reaction to the practical implications relating to the loss is hard and even unbearable. We realize now that there is no way out of the situation and its results. We experience low morale and low energy. Some might experience severe depression.

Coaching Tip

You need to understand that this is not an easy phase. What they need the most during that phase is positive feedback and reassurance. They need emotional support and a new perspective about opportunities remaining for them.

STAGE 5: Acceptance

When we realize that resisting the hard truth and change won't help, grief starts to go away. Welcome to the last stage, acceptance. Real change starts with acceptance. However, this is not a period of happiness and excitement and must be distinguished from depression.

Coaching Tip

This is where your client sees the results of his or her hard work. The individual can start to change, move and even begin to be motivated. It's time to celebrate the move towards a new future and hope. Make sure you highlight and explore your client's progress and assess the new direction and goals.

Always Keep in Mind

Make sure that the client defines the outcome and work baby steps towards it. Believe in them all the way, even in their hardest times. It's where they need it most! Acknowledge any progress you see and focus on bringing an awareness to the present and the positive possibilities of the future. Assist them in creating and defining a clear positive picture of their future.

Help them find words to express their negative and positive feelings. Assist them in their goals to create new positive experiences and diffuse flashbacks. Remember, grieving is a personal process that has no time limit, nor one “right” way to do it. You might even need to stop it and refer them to a professional.

Be comfortable with lengthy silences and agitated states. Brainstorm actions in their present that are healthy for their wellbeing. Always keep your eyes on serious signs like mental illness or suicidal thoughts. In these cases, refer them to a specialist. You need to be clear about your boundaries and your role from the start.

Finally, create a safe, free from judgement space where they can freely express themselves. Listen and believe what the client says is true for them in that moment. You need to meet them where they are at. You are not here to punish or lead them. When it’s possible and at their own pace, they will most probably start moving towards the life that they want.