Expository Text: Grief is normal and natural, but to those who have experienced a significant loss , grief can upend their life, personality, beliefs about the world, and even their sense of reality. There is no standard time limit to the bereavement process and there is no right or wrong way to go through it. Some people get angry, some people become completely numb, and some people find their grief becoming complicated and seemingly intractable.

After a loss, many people experience guilt, but some become overwhelmed and have difficulty moving forward. Click on each character for a brief description then click Let's Begin to hear the counseling session.

Characters

**Tracy Davis:** Tracy Davis is a science teacher at Lindner Hills High School. Tracy is fifty-one years old and never married, though she has had a few serious relationships. For the last thirteen years Tracy was the primary caretaker for her mother who suffered from severe lupus. Four months ago, her mother passed away.

**Susan Florman:** Susan Florman is a licensed medical social worker in the hospice program at Riverbend City Medical Center. She was the case manager for Tracy's mother during her hospitalizations over the last several years and helped Tracy and her mother arrange for in-home hospice care.

Instructions:

Scenario

**Tracy:**

Thanks for making the time to see me.

**Susan:**

Of course. So … what's going on?

**Tracy:**

Oh, man… where to start?

**Susan:**

I heard that your mom passed away this spring? I'm sorry for your loss.

**Tracy:**

Thanks. It happened right after Easter. Which, you know, was not a big surprise. She'd been going downhill since she was in here at Christmas and she was in a lot of pain, I know. It was really hard for her … so … I know I should accept that this is for the best.

**Susan:**

That's a lot to ask of yourself, don't you think? To see the loss of your Mom as being for the best?

**Tracy:**

I guess. I'm just feeling so … I don't know. It's selfish. I wasn't always very nice to Mama when she was with me and now I'm wishing I could apologize. Make it right. I know there's no going back with something like this, but I can't stop thinking about some of the things I said to her. Just hateful things. I want to take it all back … which, I know I can't, but it tears me up when I think about it.

**Susan:**

It's hard to be a caregiver for as many years as you cared for your mother. Am I remembering correctly that you were pretty much on your own? Not everyone can do that.

**Tracy:**

What else could I have done? Put her in a nursing home? It was her house we were living in. I moved in with her when my engagement fell apart. She took me in when I was a wreck. That's her house I'm living in now. It's not mine. I think that's one of the things I'm struggling with… Everyone is being so nice and consoling to me and I don't deserve it. There are things… Well I don't want to go into it, but I was no angel. Mama deserved better.

**Susan:**

Do you feel like you were abusive to your mother?

**Tracy:**

No! I mean…no. Not really. I never hit her or shook her or anything like that but… (Starts to cry) some of the things I said to her, maybe I was abusive. I didn't mean them. I loved my mother. I really did and I hope she knew that, but sometimes I said things that were just terrible.

**Susan:**

You know, I don't think I've ever met a caregiver who didn't say something he or she regretted later. Of course I've never met a person who wasn't a caregiver who hasn't said something regrettable, either.

**Tracy:**

I know, I know. I just miss her so much and I find myself replaying the fights we have over and over in my brain and it just makes me feel sick.

**Susan:**

Did you fight often?

**Tracy:**

I wouldn't say often, but… well, Mama did know how to push my buttons. It was so hard doing everything by myself, and I swear sometimes it seemed like she was going out of her way to make it harder for me. Toward the end, she had a real problem with bed wetting but it seemed like I could offer her the bedpan 20 times in the evening and she wouldn't use it, but as soon as I fell asleep at night, she'd wet the bed and then be calling for me to come clean her up. That was one of the biggest things we fight about, but that's still no excuse for me to tell her I'm going to put her in a nursing home. But I did.

**Susan:**

Well, you told her that you would do that …but did you actually do it?

**Tracy:**

No. Of course not. That's not the point, though. She didn't need to hear that kind of talk. I'd tell her I was sick of her and once… oh, I can't believe I'm admitting this. Once I told her I'd be glad when she was gone and I'd have my life back again.

**Susan:**

I can see why you wish you hadn't said that, but it seems like you're really beating yourself up over this. Is there something else you're reacting to?

**Tracy:**

I just feel like I didn't do enough. She suffered so much and she was in so much pain. I should've done more to make life easier for her.

**Conclusion**

Bereavement is by its nature unique to each individual. Identifying those individuals who might be at-risk for complicated grief can help ensure they receive the appropriate intervention and assistance. You may want to review the case study again, paying attention to what Tracy's comments indicate about her risk factors.

Credits

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