

Carla Washburn's Grief Support Group

Transcription

SOCIAL WORKER: I want to welcome everybody to the Grief and Loss Group here at the church. I appreciate that you all are taking your time to come out and participate. My name is Shannon and I'm going to be facilitating this group and just wanted to give some information about kind of how things go. This is a closed group. It's also a time-limited group. And so what that means is that the people who are in the group right now are going to be the people who are participating for the next 12 weeks. For that reason, I would like to create a safe space where everybody can feel like they can talk and participate to the level that they are comfortable. So if you are not able to make one of the group sessions, if you could let me know ahead of time so that we don't just have an empty space. I would also like to request that you make sure that you're on time so the group gets started on time and I think that shows a lot of respect for the other members of the group. I would like to start with just some of the basic group rules. I don't know if everybody has been in group treatment before but what we do is we just kind of set out some basic respect rules, being respectful of the language that we use, being respectful of other people's opinions and time, and making sure that everybody gets an opportunity to share their experience and their story. So I request that you don't talk when other people are talking, just kind of waiting until there's a good point for you to really to jump in and say what you need to say. So I'm wondering if anybody has any questions before we get started today.

BEVERLY: No.

SOCIAL WORKER: Everybody's good? Okay.

CHRISTY: How long are we going to be here today again?

SOCIAL WORKER: Oh, about an hour.

CHRISTY: Okay.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay. So what I'd like to do is to start off by going around the room and introducing yourself, kind of talking about how long it has been since you've experienced your loss and what has the experience of grief been for you. Can you go ahead and start over here?

JOHN: It's been a rough time. My brother died and with his death there has been a lot of stress within the family and so I've been dealing with that and it's not been easy. In fact, I don't know why I've even taken the time to come here, there's so much that I have to take care of since his death, but I'm here. And I'm hoping that by being here, I would gain some insight as to how to move forward with the things I have to do.

SOCIAL WORKER: Well, I really appreciate that you are here, because, that your experience can definitely add to the group. Can you tell us what your name is?

JOHN: Oh, my name is John.

SOCIAL WORKER: Nice to meet you, John.

JOHN: Thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay.

BEVERLY: My name is Beverly and I go to church here and they suggested this would be a good group to help me through the loss of my son. My husband and I, we only had one child and he died on overdose and it's really been hard. Really, really hard for me. He had a girlfriend. She got him involved in drugs. He had just gotten back from Afghanistan and he was—he thought maybe he'd have to go to Iraq, and—he was going to go to college. There's just been so much going on. We're really having a hard time with it and I'm having the hardest time, so the church minister here suggested I come and be a part of this group.

SOCIAL WORKER: Well, welcome, welcome.

BEVERLY: Thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER: Thank you for sharing.

CARLA: My name is Carla and I have come because my sister wanted me to. So, hopefully it will be a rewarding experience for me, but my preference is really not to be here.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay, thank you for coming.

PATTY: And my name is Patty and my husband died about 6 weeks ago from lung cancer and he was sick for about 8 months before that and I was his caregiver. So the last 6 weeks have been really hard because I have three kids and they really have a lot of needs right now emotionally so I've been trying to take care of them and I still have a--my husband's mother and father are still alive and they're really devastated by what's

going on, so I've been just trying to take care of everybody and then take care of all the details when somebody dies and...

CHRISTY: Oh I totally know how that feels.

PATTY: Yeah.

CHRISTY: Yeah.

PATTY: Yeah. So in all of that, I just feel like maybe I need to be here to talk about it, what's going on.

SOCIAL WORKER: That sounds like it's been a difficult time for you so I really appreciate that you made time to come here tonight.

PATTY: Thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER: Yeah.

CHRISTY: My name is Christy and I know how you're all feeling. I feel the same way and it's just so hard. My mom died a couple of months ago and we just didn't get along before she died and I'm the only child and so everything came on me. I'm just trying to deal with now figuring out how I'm going to pay for the funeral and all the bills when she was in hospice. She had a ton of bills before she got ill. And I didn't find out that she was dying until the last minute, and so the fact that we didn't have any relationship was just—it's been really hard. I don't know if I should feel sad, if I should be happy that she's not there, I don't have to worry about the lack of relationship or—I know it sounds awful but I just—I'm really having a hard time and I don't know—you know, I need this. I think this is such a good place to be for me right now and I mean I don't have a lot of supports to kind of help me through this whole thing. And the people at the hospice try to call me on a regular basis and make sure I'm doing okay, and I tell them it's I don't know how to feel and I've got all of her belongings, I don't know what to do with those and—I've got a couple friends but they don't understand and they've got better relationships with their family, and I don't have other people that I can count on like you do and I just—somebody had told me about this group and thought this was such a good idea and I just—I don't know if I should be upset, if I should be—it's like I don't know how to feel and I just—it's like numb but at the same time I just—it's so much. And now it's affecting my job and I—people at work are worried about me but I—it's just, you know? I don't know. And I don't know what the next step is and so, do I just sell all of her things but then there's some sentimental value to some of it but then it brings the bad memories and our relationship was just so—she was so domineering and everything was about her all the time and it just was so frustrating...

SOCIAL WORKER: Yeah.

CHRISTY: ...and I just don't--I'm having a hard time and...

SOCIAL WORKER: Well, it sounds like this has been a real struggle for you as it has been for everybody with this...

CHRISTY: It really has.

SOCIAL WORKER: ...grieving process has been really difficult. And I hope that those are some of the things that we can start to talk about and share and provide support for each other around, because I don't think that you're the only one who is having those mixed emotions.

CHRISTY: I hope so. Yeah.

SOCIAL WORKER: So I think part of this group can really focus on bringing together that support network.

CHRISTY: I hope so.

SOCIAL WORKER: So starting today, we are going to go through the process of grief and we're going to start with the different stages and the first stage that we are going to talk about today is something that Christy brought up which is the anger.

CHRISTY: Yeah, it's such a hard thing. I mean, I'm so upset. I just don't--and I know I should be sad but I'm so mad about everything.

Group Session 3

SOCIAL WORKER: We're starting our third session and I just wanted to kind of recap what we've been talking about. Last week we started really getting into what our support systems look like and how we can best utilize those to get through this really difficult process.

BEVERLY: Exactly.

SOCIAL WORKER: So let's go ahead and recap. Last week, we talked about our support systems and how we can effectively utilize them in order to help us through this process. And today I think we can really start talking about what are coping skills that we have to get through this process. So I'd like to do a little bit of brainstorming with you guys to talk about how we each can learn from each other how person is handling this differently. Before we get started though, I would like to go ahead and do our check

in and see how your week has gone and if you've been able to tap into any of your support systems. So we'll go ahead and start with you.

CHRISTY: Yeah. I'll go, yeah. My mother's stuff is still sitting there staring at me, and it's like just a constant reminder of her and that horrible relationship I had with her and it just sits there and it looks at me and I don't know what to do with it. And I'm so angry that we left on--that she died and that it left on such this negative note. I mean, she was very domineering and very--it was all about her all the time and I think now, the more I look at it, it was very abusive. There was a lot of verbal abuse and a lot of--when I was really little --neglect. And so I look at the things that are just sitting there and they're like reminding me of all the issues that we had in our relationship and it's just--I don't cope really well with it and I get angry and I am mad at myself for being angry and I don't know what to do and--I had a wonderful relationship with my grandmother, her mother and there's things in that pile that were hers and so I don't want to get rid of it, but yet, I don't know what to do with it and I'm just really struggling and I don't know if I...

PATTY: I'm sorry. But maybe I could help you go through with things, then...

CHRISTY: I don't know if I can do it. I don't know if I can go through all of that and bring out the emotions over and over and I just--

PATTY: Well, I could come and be there for you and do it and you could just tell me like do I keep it or get rid of it or...

CHRISTY: Maybe, yeah.

PATTY: I would be happy to help you.

JOHN: I'd be glad to help you too and in fact, I'll bring my truck and be able to take care of all that stuff.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay, okay.

CHRISTY: Thank you. I think that may be the first step in moving on and the other thing is really I've got the support systems we talked about last week. Mine are just failing, they're not there and it's hard not to get depressed and feel like I have no one and it's...

PATTY: Do you want to come to dinner at my house? I can have you come over. You could come and be with me and my kids.

CHRISTY: That would be nice.

PATTY: Would you like to do that?

CHRISTY: Yeah, that would be--

SOCIAL WORKER: That's something that we can talk about later, but let's go ahead and keep moving and thank you for sharing that. Sounds like you have had kind of a difficult week.

CHRISTY: It has been, thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay.

PATTY: Well, my time since the last two weeks it's been kind of hard. One thing that happened was the life insurance check came and it just sort of reminded me again about how final this is and my husband is not there and that made me really sad even though it probably should have made me happy because it was a big check and it'll help me get by, but it just reminded me of it all.

SOCIAL WORKER: Money doesn't replace what you've lost.

PATTY: Right, yeah. I'm just really sad.

SOCIAL WORKER: Absolutely. Thank you.

CARLA: Well, I'm just listening to everyone and I guess in the past two weeks, I have to think about my grandson over and over again because I raised him so I knew everything about him and we did things together. We played together. He even played tea with me. I love to play tea. He's all boy, but he would play tea with me and he listened to me. I listened to him. I went to his games. We read books. We did things together. I played T-ball, baseball, I was there for him. I was there for him and he was there for me. That was very important.

CHRISTY: I wish my mom would have been there like that.

CARLA: Well, I tell you, it's such a rewarding experience him being a boy and me being a girl. I can say that now that I'm much older, I am a girl. So anyway, we had a good time. I enjoyed him. He enjoyed me. He seemed to understand that--well, his mother wasn't around that much and it was okay to be with grandmother and that meant a lot to me. As you know, I told you in the first session, I didn't want to be here, I really didn't. It's the church group--and I do go to church and so I was like, "Okay, you should do it," and my sister was encouraging me to do it, so I wanted her to stop bothering me and so I came, but I'm glad I did. I'm glad I have come and had the opportunity to talk about him. I do want to bring his name up a lot because it's actually painful to do that. And you just can't share your grief with everybody, you just can't. Nobody understands, I mean, he's my grandson, how could you.

SOCIAL WORKER: It sounds like the past two weeks you've been really focusing on the positive parts of your relationship and really thinking about how he impacted in your life and how you impacted his and that can be very powerful. So thank you for sharing that and we are--I think I can speak for everybody, we're really glad that you decided to come.

CARLA: Thank you.

CHRISTY: I'm so angry, how are you not angry? I'm so angry.

CARLA: It's not that. It's like have ever been too hurt to cry?

CHRISTY: Yeah.

CARLA: That's the pain that you cannot describe. It's one that you have to live and I trust that no one in this circle will have to live that pain, it's real and I just couldn't believe it. I just didn't want to accept it. And at his funeral, the minister said, "Loose him and let him go," that is scripture. And the scripture talking about Lazarus and taking those binding clothes off of him. So mentally, I need to loose my grandson and let him go and in that loosening, I'm not verbalizing it. So I guess that's what my sister was doing when she said to me because she knows that part of my personality so she was saying to me, "You need to go to the group." And so since, for whatever reason when we were kids, we always listen to each other. So if she would tell me to do something, I would do it. If I would tell her to do something, she would do it. So that's why I came in the first place. I keep saying that because I wouldn't, when you said that anger is not showing, I would not have come without her encouragement because I'm a strong personality. So because I am, I didn't feel like I needed a support group. I could do this. I could do this.

SOCIAL WORKER: Well, it sounds like your sister is a huge support to you by utilizing her...

CARLA: I didn't. I just did it so she could stop telling me to, really.

All: Laughter

SOCIAL WORKER: Go ahead and we're going to John?

JOHN: Well, I have been coping. In fact I found that there are some good ways to cope, but I'm afraid if I continue with those good ways that may take me to some other issues. So that's why I have decided to come back because I needed to learn this good way to cope. So I'm here to learn.

SOCIAL WORKER: So it sounds like you've been using things--outside things to help you...

JOHN: Yes

SOCIAL WORKER: ...to get through this really difficult time and recognizing that, but that's not really coping. That's hiding.

JOHN: It's not the best way. You're right.

SOCIAL WORKER: Okay. Good. Well, thank you for sharing that.

BEVERLY: Well, I don't know if I've done as well as everybody else. Today is my son's birthday and it is so sad. He was our only son. We had this child late in life. He was going to go to college--I mean, my husband lost his job, I mean, he would be the first one to go to school in our family. We just barely made it out of high school. My husband, he worked at GM and I work at Wal-Mart and so when he lost his job, we couldn't send him to college on that kind of money that I made that's when he joined the army. And then all of this happened, he comes back, he's going to try and go to school using his GI Bill and he meets this girl and things just kept getting worse in terms of work, no work, a girlfriend, people wanting to feel good--I'm sure, I am just sure she got him strung out on these drugs. And as a veteran, I want him--he's a good boy, I mean, he really was. He took care of us the best way he could being a young lad, so late in life, I mean--

CARLA: You're making him seem bigger than what he was.

BEVERLY: He was. He was good. He was a very good--

CARLA: How do you even talk like that in the sense that--

BEVERLY: He did things for other people, he was respectful to us.

CARLA: You said that his girlfriend made him do that. His girlfriend didn't make him do that.

BEVERLY: She was there all the time. I know she had connections.

CARLA: How do you know that?

BEVERLY: She took him on weekend trips. I know they were getting drugs. He didn't do those things [overlap]--

CARLA: I think that it could help you accept the fact that he's living up to his responsibility and [overlap].

BEVERLY: That is not going to happen.

PATTY: We're here to support each other. Can't we just all try to get along? [overlap].

BEVERLY and CARLA: Arguing

SOCIAL WORKER: Pardon me. Pardon me. Pardon me. [overlap]. We have to remember we have to be respectful. We have to remember to be respectful.

CARLA: I'm not saying that your son--no, I'm not saying that he--what he was doing fighting for the country yeah, that's important, absolutely. I'm saying that it could help with your grief if you accept the fact that perhaps he didn't make wise choices himself rather than putting it on his girlfriend.

CHRISTY: I wish I had a parent that felt that. My mom just wasn't that supportive of me and you're so supportive.

CARLA: [overlap] My grandson was not on drugs or anything like that. He--

BEVERLY: Well, my son wasn't--

CARLA: I'm not trying to make a hero out of my grandson per se and he didn't get involved in all of that. I'm just saying that if you accept the fact...

BEVERLY: I can't. It's too hard at this point.

CARLA: ...that your son did not--well, that's--

BEVERLY: We've lost--my loss is as great as your loss.

CARLA: I don't deny that part. I'm just saying that he had a responsibility and he didn't live up to his--

BEVERLY: He was a responsible person.

CARLA: How could he be if you just said that his girlfriend--

BEVERLY: I am sure his girlfriend--

SOCIAL WORKER: Let's make sure that we're allowing each other to talk and we're not talking over each other because then nobody is hearing what the other person is saying. So let's kind of go back to those group rules of everybody just taking their turn in talking.

PATTY: I just don't feel like this is helping because I feel like we should be trying to get along and support each other and--that we ought to be able to do that and not be yelling and--

CHRISTY: Both of them is just so passionate about who they lost and my mother never felt that passion for me. I know she didn't and I just--I wish that I felt like she had loved me the way that these women love their sons or...

CARLA: We're not trying to make you feel bad.

BEVERLY: No.

CARLA: That's not the point here. That is not the issue.

BEVERLY: No, right

CARLA: Rather, it's like the purpose of the group is to sit and talk about our grief. I'm just saying as a part of the healing to accept what...

BEVERLY: I can't go there though. I just can't go there.

SOCIAL WORKER: And that's part of the process

CARLA: And that's part of the healing. And that's hard to say, "Well, hey, he didn't do things like I wanted him to do, but he was still my son and I still love him"...

BEVERLY: I know. I know.

CARLA: ...that doesn't defeat that.

BEVERLY: And I know I got to find other resources and other things to make me accept this and look at it in a different way.