

INCAN- DIES CENT

The Hope in our Grief and Loss

Time will heal, does it not? Experts opine that we may have been using the wrong tools to deal with the most basic human experience – grief and loss. There is real hope in recovering from grief.

We may find ourselves biting our lips, uncertain of what to say to comfort a friend who got retrenched or had just lost a loved one. We do not want to sound insensitive or unsympathetic. Many of us also experience receiving comforting words from well-meaning friends that make sense to the mind but feel hollow to the mourning heart. Some comments hurt us so much that we even lose the friendship. Often, we fumble along the journey of grief, which may continue for years and even decades. We are in desperate need for better understanding of grief and loss and the hope of recovering from it.

WHAT IS GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is the emotional response to loss. Grief and loss not dealt with can linger and affect our lives. Loss happens to anyone at any age. It happens to a 4-year-old girl when her friend transfers to another childcare centre. It happens to an executive in his mid-fifties when he feels that his boss is

favouring a younger colleague over him. Technically, it happens when we stop having something or someone that we used to have or expect to have. Loss can happen in both tangible and intangible ways. There are many life events that are regarded as loss and can produce grief. We have listed some examples below.

- Death or missing of family member, friend, enemy
- Death or missing of pet
- Loss of meaningful object of belonging or finances
- Divorce/Relationship breakup
- Relocation
- Loss of identity
- Retrenchment or demotion
- Betrayal of trust in workplace
- Loss of memories (e.g. dementia)/ Change in health of loved one
- Personal injury or disability
- Children leaving home/Peers leaving group (eg. Office, church)

Grief, on the other hand, is a normal and natural response to loss of any kind.

WHEN EASTER BROKE

GM's Reflections

You grieved your parents. You grieved the Holy Spirit. Words that we do not want to hear.

Grief isn't something we take lightly. It is a strong emotion, possibly one of the more overwhelming and overpowering pain emotions. We don't wish for it and we can't get rid of it, sometimes for a lifetime. Grief is a natural outcome of our losses in life.

Grief is also a very painful emotion that does not sit well with most of us, when others around us grieve and we wonder what to do. What do we say at a hospital to someone with a loved one facing impending death, a funeral or news of a tragic situation? What about someone going

“When Easter broke, all the losses in our lives took a complete change.”

through a breakup, divorce, or loss of their jobs, pets, fortune, or failed an exam, or...a myriad of other tangible and intangible losses?

Until I went for a recent Grief Recovery Programme, I didn't realise there were so many losses in my life. Some screamed out at me to pay attention. **Many, however, were a surprise to me because they were hidden, suppressed. I did not have time or allowed myself time to face the issues that did hurt, did matter, but all too often quickly “dealt with” and pushed under or aside.**

We all want to be strong and capable, not weak, vulnerable or needy. So, losses are often cast aside and seemingly forgotten, but not necessarily dealt with. Sometimes, grief can be an all-consuming black hole that we cannot get out of, and we feel we are a walking dead or a living sad person. And over time, everyone thinks we should have gotten over whatever losses we experienced, and we need to put on a brave front. 'Keep Calm and Carry On', Keep Smiling, Keep Working, Keep Going. What else can one do? So, we skew our outlook to “get over things”, our words to those suffering grief and losses to be comforting and by comforting, we mean to say something nice, positive, even victorious so as not to encourage more doom and gloom. Sometimes we even feel the need to talk about miracles, or at least a platitude.

The first Easter, there were people who loved Jesus, who suffered a great and tragic loss - Jesus' mother, his siblings, the women who supported, admired and loved Him, the disciples

who lived with Him for 3 years and were willing to go into battle with Him. They had their dreams temporarily crushed when He died on the first Good Friday. Then Easter came. The Christian message of Easter is so consistent with Jesus' counter-cultural ways. Losses bring grief to human lives. With Jesus, His death, HIS LOSS becomes OUR GAIN. In theology, it is called Substitution. Penal Substitution where Jesus took on the penalty of mankind's sin in order for us to be forgiven by God. His loss is OUR HOPE. **When Easter broke, all the losses in our lives took a complete change.** Now there are things that lasts for eternity! All our losses can be seen in the light of that. Injustices, failures, unchangeable, deep losses on this side of the world takes on different meaning when we know what can and will last, and what we want to invest in because of that Substitution on Easter.

For now, while still in this flesh, we still struggle with grief because we will lose people, things, issues that we stand for. Yet, because of Easter, we have both the hope as well as the motivation to be Easter People who can bring comfort to a grieving world. Let us, at EMCC, also help you in your grief.



Jeannie Chiu

Dr Jeannie Chiu
General Manager, EMCC

James and Friedman who developed The Grief Recovery Method¹ regarded grief as the conflicting feelings of 'reaching out for someone who has always been there, only to find that when we need them one more time, they are no longer there', or in the case of a problematic relationship, 'of reaching out for someone who has never been there for you and still is not'. We are all grievers experiencing different kinds of loss at different points of our lives.

As every relationship is unique, our grief is also unique. It could manifest emotionally, in our body, in our thoughts, behaviourally² and spiritually. Some common grief reactions are categorised below³.

Physical

- Tightness in chest • Lack of energy • Hollowness in stomach • Oversensitivity to noise, particular images or smell

Emotions

- Sadness • Anger • Guilt and self-blame • Anxiety • Numbness

Thoughts

- Forgetfulness • Difficulty concentrating • Intrusive thoughts or obsessive thoughts

Behaviors

- Insomnia • Changes in appetite • Have related dreams • Loss of interest in pleasurable activities

Spirituality

- Sense of connectedness or emptiness • Confront existential questions • Doubts about beliefs

Some grieve for a very long time. This knowledge helps us respect each person's unique journey. We can also allow ourselves the time and space to recover from our grief instead of being self-critical.

BARRIERS TO OUR RECOVERY

We learn how to acquire things at a young age. Unfortunately, we seldom learn to cope with losing things. Like

a farmer attempting to use a sickle to fix an aeroplane, we tend to use the wrong tool around grief and loss.

One “wrong tool” is a faulty belief system or advice which includes:

1) Don't feel bad

Often, well-intended friends may comfort by telling griever, “don't be sad, at least she is in a better place” or “don't cry, maybe someone nice has adopted your lost dog”. This stops the griever from expressing his natural emotions to the loss. Imagine a pressure cooker of held-in emotions that overflows over time. Sometimes, a person with prolonged inability to stop feeling sad or angry may feel guilt or self-blame.

2) Replace the loss

Some of us may learn to cope with loss by replacing it. Parents may tell their crying children, “it's ok, we will buy a new toy car for you” friends may say, “don't be sad, there are many fishes in the sea, find a new girlfriend” or “never mind the retrenchment, you will find a better job”. This encourages griever to ignore their feelings and move on, still holding on to past baggage.

3) Grieve alone

Some of us might have been told to stay in our rooms to cry when we were young. It is impressed upon most of us that crying in front of others is embarrassing or burdensome. Others may say, “let's give her some space” or “take a day off to go home and be by yourself, you will feel better”. This perpetuates the belief that one should cope with difficult feelings alone, preventing griever from seeking support, and becoming increasingly isolated.

4) Time will heal

This is a strong and pervasive belief that many hold. Yet many griever continue to feel the pain of a loss decades later. Some cannot visit places that are full of memories related to a loss. When others voice their expectations, “don't tell me you

are still affected after so long?” can cause frustration or guilt. Many end up believing that they have issues. Yet, time alone merely enables people to numb or distant themselves from their emotions. Recovery comes from the things that griever do with time.

5) Be strong for others

This is another guilt-inducing expectation laid by others or ourselves. “You have to be strong for your young child” or “be strong, your sister needs you.” This hijacks people from facing their grief honestly to recover from it.

We are no stranger to the statements described above. While a loss can be understood intellectually, responses to loss are usually emotional. Therefore, intellectual statements do not help with the recovery of grief and can confuse us about our emotions.



Did you know? People may go through any of these 5 stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. But it does not happen in a linear fashion. Our grief is as individual as we are and does not follow a definite progression.

“Losing my father to cancer was the biggest blow to my life. His time of diagnosis and death happened within 3 months and I felt extremely guilty for not urging him to seek immediate medical help when he first complained about feeling unwell. His last words continue to haunt me, “Sorry for leaving you so soon. Please take care of mum and brother.”

While I needed time to grieve the sudden passing of my father, I was unable to do so freely. Every time mum saw me cry, she would say “Stop crying! You are making us sad again.” Her words meant that my tears were hurting them. I started crying in secret and became increasingly lonely and unhappy.

My hidden grief was intolerable and I hurried myself to forget and move on. Suppressing my sadness turned it into an unquenchable anger which I started taking out on those closest to me. I knew I needed professional help.

Counselling allowed me to cry freely, giving me space to express myself as my grief needed to be heard and witnessed. My counsellor helped me to understand how grief works and normalised the series of emotions I experienced, especially on special occasions like Father's Day or his birthday. I found meaning in my grief, in acknowledging and remembering him as a very significant person in my life.”

Joanna, 27 years old



Counselling @ EMCC helps individuals, couples and families to deal better with negative experiences and emotions. It increases self-awareness, offers new insights, highlights personal strengths, develops positive ways of coping and helps one to problem-solve with confidence and clarity. Through counselling, married couples or families can enhance attachment, resolve conflict and build intimacy within their relationships.

EMCC'S WORK IN COUNSELLING

• Depression • Anxiety • Addictions • School/Work-Related Stress • Marriage • Divorce • Parenting • Identity and Sexuality • Grief and Loss • Eating and Sleeping Issues • Personal Development • Anger Management • Art Therapy for Children

HELPFUL STEPS TO COMPLETE OUR GRIEVING PROCESS

We do not need to carry pain from loss like walking with small pebbles in our shoes. The goal of grief recovery is to be able to reminisce the fond memories without the painful feelings of regret, remorse or anger. Through recovery, painful thoughts transform into memories.

There are three important elements in grief recovery:

• Express grief • Be heard • Deliver unfinished communication

Grievers are to verbalise every joy, sadness, remorse, regret, anger and even confusion that they experienced in the relationship and around the loss without being judged, analysed or told to act in a certain way. The listener simply listens and appreciates that everyone is entitled to all the feelings and views towards our loss as each relationship is unique, even if it seems wrong.

If you or a loved one is struggling with pain and grief, these steps adapted from *The Grief Recovery Method* may be of help.

Step 1: Identify significant events in the loss relationship and how it has impacted you, both positively and negatively.

Relationships include difficult moments such as childhood abuse, events that betrayed your trust, disappointments, fears and even confusion on how the loss happened. It should also include important positive memories such as celebrations, events that made you feel cared for, and other fond memories. For the loss of object, note the significant experiences you have

had around it. Write them down in chronological order.

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Step 2: Find someone to listen as you express your grief over the loss.

Through sharing significant events and emotions with someone, allow yourself to be true to your emotions. Describe the events and express your grief in its true intensity. The listener can be a friend, or a family member who will keep your sharing confidential. Invite the person not to respond, ask questions, touch, or even offer a tissue paper (so as not to distract) as you share your feelings but simply be present and listen to you. The person may offer a hug to you after your sharing, to affirm you and what you say as important and accepted.



Step 3: Decide whether to appreciate, apologise or forgive

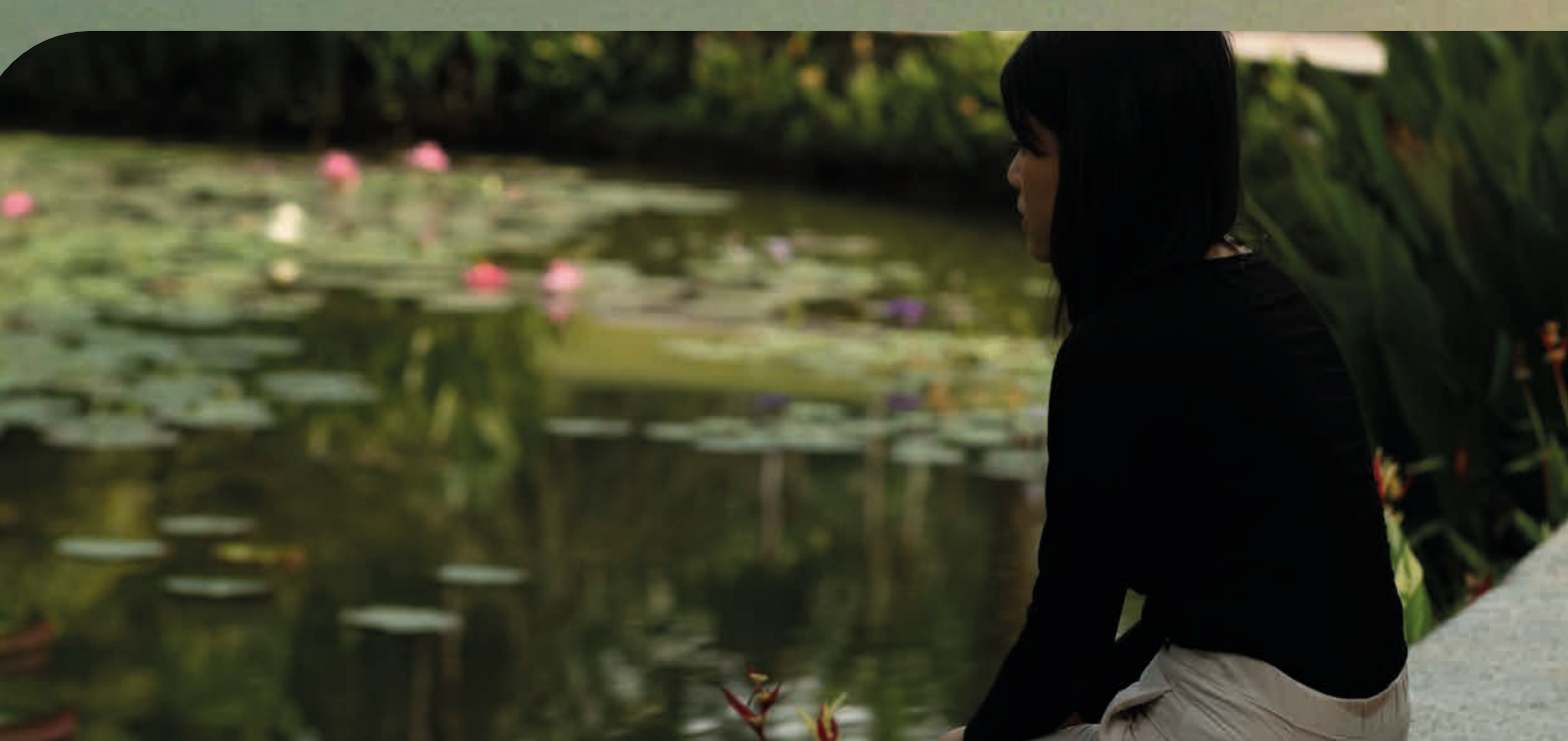
Forgiveness is not about condoning the person's actions that hurt you but is about releasing yourself from the hurts so that you can fully participate in life again. If forgiving is too big a step to take, start with acknowledging hurts first. Then communicate your appreciation, apology or forgiveness of each significant event to your chosen listener (not the one who caused grief). This is to deliver unfinished communication and thereby complete the loss. Do remind the listener to refrain from questioning or commenting, but instead to simply listen.

Follow the three steps for every significant loss that you experience

Effective Conflict Management Workshop

EMCC practices mediation, a process that requires the highest level of conflict management skills. We have developed this workshop to impart to participants a good understanding of the nature and causes of conflicts. This workshop will help you to recognise your personal style of managing various conflicts and teach you basic tools and skills on how to resolve interpersonal conflicts in your family, community and workplace in an effective manner.

If you would like to consider this for your organisation/team, we would like to support you by developing a programme to suit your specific needs. We would like to hear from you at reachus@emcc.org.sg.



for a more holistic recovery. It may be difficult to face your grief at the start but do persist. Reach out to a trusted friend or seek professional help for your journey of recovery.

References

1. James, J.W. & Friedman, R. (2009). *The Grief Recovery Handbook (20th Anniversary Expanded Edition)*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers.
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- Grief. In Stets, J. E. & Turner, J. H. (2007). *Handbook of sociology of emotions*, pp516-543. New York: Springer Science.
3. Worden, J. W. (2009). *Grief counselling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner (4th ed.)*. New York: Springer Publishing. In Ng, C. (2018). *Journeying with the Bereaved* [PowerPoint slides]. TCA College.
 4. Kubler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D. (2005). *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. New York: Scribner.

‘Gottman Method Couples Therapy’ Training (For Professionals working with Couples)

The ‘Gottman Method Couples Therapy’ is a powerful tool, renowned all over the world. This therapy method has 30 years of research done and is famed for developing a very structured programme to support couples in conflict.

Whether you are mentoring or counselling married couples, this training will equip you with effective skills to support them in their marriage journey. Besides enabling the couples you support to increase intimacy, respect and affection as foundations to a sound relationship, you will be empowered to help them tackle gridlocks in their relationship.

Register your interest at training@emcc.org.sg.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

1) “The Grief Recovery Handbook (20th Anniversary Expanded Edition)” by John W. James and Russell Friedman on how to take effective actions to complete the grieving process and work towards recovery.

2) “It’s OK That You’re Not OK” by Megan Devine, helps readers to rethink our relationship with grief, seeing it as a natural response to universal experiences of death and loss, instead of something to be fixed.



Mediation @ EMCC helps to resolve disputes in a confidential and non-confrontational manner, with the aim to preserve relationships. A neutral third-party, the mediator, facilitates both parties to focus on issues that are important to be resolved and consider pragmatic solutions which are mutually acceptable. It is a more affordable, faster and private alternative to litigation.

EMCC’s Work in Mediation

• Marital Conflict • Divorce or Post-divorce Conflicts • Workplace Disputes • Family Disputes on Eldercare, or Probate and Estate Matters • Parent-Child Disputes • Church Disputes between Leaders and/or Members • Community, Family and other Relational Disputes

Counselling for Frontline Healthcare Workers fighting COVID-19

As frontline fighters of COVID-19, you may be feeling burdened, stressed or anxious during this period.

EMCC wants to support you while you help others. We are extending our counselling to you free-of-charge for up to 3 sessions, as long as the DORSCON level remains at Orange.

Counselling will be conducted via online platforms like Skype.

Do fill in the appointment form via www.emcc.org.sg or call us at **6788 8220** to make an enquiry/appointment.

Seven Principles Programme (7PP)

Based on New York Times bestseller 'The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work' by Dr John Gottman, this workshop helps couples better understand their relationship, learn ways to foster friendship, trust and intimacy and navigate relational conflicts with their spouses. Highly recommended for marriage workshop/marriage enrichment retreat.

"7PP is Dr. Gottman's well researched framework and comprise foundational skills that complement Biblical teachings. Anyone who wants to intentionally develop humility and grow their marriage will want to develop these skills."
- Pastor Jeremy, Covenant Evangelical Free Church

"I've learnt a simple and structured, yet research-based approach for couples' work." – Anson Yoo, Counsellor, Barker Road Methodist Church

"Seven refreshing and relevant principles that encourage enduring relationships and meaningful marriages." – Rev Poh Heow Lee, Pastor-In-Charge, Foochow Methodist Church

Call us at **6788 8220** to enquire or visit our website www.emcc.org.sg for more information.

WE HAVE MOVED!

Our new office space is at
331 North Bridge Road
#22-01/06 Odeon Towers
Singapore 188720

Mainline remains unchanged
at **6788 8220**.

DONATION METHODS

1. Cheque

Please make your crossed cheque payable to "EMCC", indicating your full name, NRIC and contact details at the back of the cheque (for tax-deductible receipt), and mail it to our address.

EMCC

331 North Bridge Road
#22-01/06 Odeon Towers
Singapore 188720

2. Online

Visit Giving.SG (<https://www.giving.sg/emcc>) or Give.Asia (https://give.asia/campaign/donate_to_emcc#) to make your donation.

3. PayNow

Using your bank app, scan the QR code or key in the UEN number: **S97SS0164E**. Please email us upon donating, at donate@emcc.org.sg, with the transaction details, your full name, NRIC and contact details if you need a tax deductible receipt.



The Grief Recovery Method®
by The Grief Recovery Institute®

Grief Recovery Programme

People say you have to let go and move on. But they don't tell you how. The Grief Recovery Method Programme developed and refined over the past 30 years, teaches you how to recover from loss with supportive guidance every step of the way.

Group Programme

- 4 to 12 pax a group
- 6 weekly sessions, 2 hours per session
- \$360 (Special rate!)
- Upcoming runs start on:
 - 15 Apr, Wed at 7pm
 - 17 Jun, Wed at 7pm
 - 19 Aug, Wed at 7pm
 - 21 Oct, Wed at 7pm

Call us at **6788 8220** to enquire or visit our website www.emcc.org.sg for more information.

Receive a
copy of The
Grief Recovery
Handbook!