

TAPS
Institute for Hope and Healing

Rebuilding Faith and Hope After Loss

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Presented by Boeing



1

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Please note: The information provided on this program is intended for educational purposes only.

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2

Personal Bio

- Studied theology for over a decade
 - Served as hospice chaplain
 - Served as Navy chaplain
- Deployed to Afghanistan in '03
- Became a Licensed Professional Counselor
- Founded *Conversing with Death*
- Owner of Body Mind Metaphor LLC
- Author of three books and over a dozen articles

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3

Introduction

- Exploring spiritual beliefs and concepts is a sensitive task
- Goal: Examine how your beliefs have been impacted by loss
 - This takes an honest and courageous look
- My presentation is not founded upon the notion of an absolute
 - My spirituality is flexible, evolving = Personal truth
 - Not always the case – Personal experience
- My approach is threefold:
 - Helping people who wish to maintain what they hold as sacred
 - Give people permission to tweak their spirituality if they so desire
 - Validate individuals who feel they need a “theological face lift”

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4

My Theoretical Orientation

- My theological studies and experiences provide insight into the process of constructing and deconstructing beliefs
- I specialize in treating depression, anxiety, trauma and grief
 - Mindfulness based – Being with feelings and thoughts without identifying yourself by them (i.e. stories)
 - Exposure therapies – facing not avoiding internal experiences
 - Existential in nature – a beginning and an end; impermanence
 - Yoga – includes breath work, asanas, meditation, chanting, mantras

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5

Learning Objectives


By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand how belief systems work in light of loss
2. Describe the three faces of belief after impact
3. Rebuild faith and hope after loss

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6

The Impact of Belief Systems After Loss




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7

Belief Systems

- A belief is composed of a number of factors:
 - Personal experience
 - Family history
 - Culture
 - Needs (personality, attachment)
 - Identity: Who am I?
 - Patterns of thinking
 - Previous beliefs




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8

Beliefs Naturally Change

- We gravitate toward different ways of seeing things based on human development
 - Minor – sometimes unnoticed
 - Major – obvious
- Think of things you once believed and now don't
 - Circumstances
 - Events
 - Cultural influences



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9

When Loss Occurs

- Loss is sometimes irrational
 - "Why"
- Loss doesn't fit into our belief systems
 - While belief is structured, life isn't
 - Brain needs to simplify/generalize
- Loss carries strong emotional components
 - Whereas beliefs are strongly rational
- Loss is potentially isolating
 - Beliefs bring people together
 - Need for attachment gravitates people to people; people to ideas

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10

Internal Responses to Loss

- Common reactions
 - Conflicting ideas
 - Confusion
 - Blurring of assessment
- Psychological
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Inflammation of symptoms
 - Physical
 - Psychological
- Relational
 - Isolation




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11

Three Faces of Belief After Loss

While you can find these soon after loss, this section focuses on belief after considerable time has passed since the event(s)




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12

Maintaining One's Faith

- Faith of our fathers
- Perhaps the most common (?)
 - Culture
 - Inability to survey
- Loyalty is a priority
 - Heritage
 - Spiritual devotion
- Goal: Realign experience into faith structure
- Social praise




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13

A Second and Third Response

- Modify one's faith system
 - Complete change
- A method that raises minimal concern
 - Often seen as a reaction
 - This response is long
 - Deconstructing the old
 - Searching for the new
- Social structures remain intact
 - Creates the most change
 - Internally – guilt, grief
 - Socially – loss of friends, family
 - Changes are subtle
- This is a step some take before moving onto the third




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14

Experiential Response

- For some painful events, move them into a mystical moment
- The experience is positive, unexplainable
- This felt sense response is important to remember, since the other three are logically entertained



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15

Rebuild Faith and Hope After Loss



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16

Embrace Experience

- Normalize internal experiences
- Suspending judgment
- See experience as experience
 - Thought as thought
 - Feeling as feeling
- Doesn't mean you have to like it
- Lotus grows out of mud




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17

Characteristic of Belief

- Beliefs evolve
 - Religious and otherwise
 - Contingent on life experiences
- In every faith system there are
 - Things one can't explain
 - Apparent or actual conflicting
- Coping strategy: Stress one belief over another
 - All loving--all powerful
 - Harold Kushner



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18

For Maintaining One's Faith

- Recall memories of how one arrived at faith to begin with
- Use other moments to nurture
- Focus on a few characteristics at a time
 - Avoid trying to make sense of it all
 - Most faith structures have paradoxical and unexplainable links
- Connect with others who not only believe the same but also have suffered
 - Mimic others of like-minded faith
- Maintain activity such as exercise, yoga, biking, etc.

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19

For Modifying One's Faith

- Know that modifying beliefs is normal
 - And can be done without cashing in the whole
- Read about how others who have made minor shifts
 - Harold Kushner: *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*
- Understand the psychology of belief
 - Find someone in your community who has a lean toward the objective
 - Non-judgmental
- Embrace the emotional unease
 - Emotions are transitional
 - Understand the role of guilt
- Anticipate some relational response

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20

Theological Face Lift


- Pause
 - Make this decision after time has passed
 - Difference between response and reaction
- Avoid a right or wrong approach
 - Highly sensitive
- Know that a positive experience can be located in various places
- Be aware of cultural reactions
- Social change
- Understand that emotional discomfort does occur
 - Could even be depression

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21

Resources

- Fowler, James W., *Stages of Faith*
- Moody, Harry R., *The Five Stages of the Soul*
- Newberg, Andrew, *Why We Believe What We Believe*
- Rambo, Lewis R., *Understanding Religious Conversion*





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22

My Contact Information

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23

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24

About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing, through an alliance with HFA, serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public. The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing was launched in March 2018.



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25

Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

November 14 **Collage Therapy: Grief, Loss, and the Expressive Arts**
In-person workshop at TAPS Institute 10am-4pm, 5 CEs available
 With **Sharon Strouse**, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT, Art Therapist at the Kristen Rita Strouse Foundation/ Artful Grief, TAPS Advisory Board Member

November 20 **So Much Has Changed: Managing Secondary Loss During the Holidays**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 pm ET
 With **Ken Doka**, PhD, MDiv, TAPS Advisory Board Member

December 03 **Understanding the Role of Medication in Coping with Grief and Loss**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 pm ET
 With **Eric Bui**, PhD, MD, Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress Disorders, Massachusetts General Hospital; Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

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26

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27
