

Self-help groups Neighbor to Neighbor

Session 2—Loss and the couple complication

To get ready	Activities	Materials	Time
<p>Obtain the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Session 2 leader guide/discussion materials* (one per group member) 2. Extension publications (one per family, optional, available from your county extension office or ISU Extension Distribution Center, 515-294-5247) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improving family communication—Take charge in changing times</i> (PM 1200) • <i>All about stress — Stress: Taking charge</i> (PM 1660a) <p>This session will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. help people understand that family members are often in different stages of loss 2. help people understand that differences within the family can be beneficial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greeting and settling in • Introduction to session (leader reads out loud) • Large group discussion • Small group discussion 	<p><i>Loss affects people differently</i> (2A)</p> <p>Questions 1-3, p. 2</p> <p><i>Different places: Benefit or betrayal?</i> (2B)</p>	<p>10 minutes</p> <p>5 minutes</p> <p>10 minutes</p> <p>15 minutes</p>
	<p>Leader reads first paragraph out loud, divides large group into three small groups, and gives the following assignments:</p> <p>Small group 1: <i>Am I betraying my spouse?</i> p. 3</p> <p>Small group 2: <i>Is my spouse betraying me?</i> p. 3</p> <p>Small group 3: <i>Do our similarities benefit us?</i> p.43</p>	<p>Questions 1-10, p. 4</p> <p>Possible answers, p. 5</p>	<p>25 minutes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large group discussion (optional) 	<p><i>Improving family communication—Take charge in changing times</i> (PM 1200)</p>	<p>5 minutes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch time and refreshments 	<p><i>All about stress—Stress: Taking charge</i> (PM 1660a)</p>	<p>5 minutes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured sharing time 	<p><i>All about stress—Stress: Taking charge</i> (PM 1660a)</p>	<p>5 minutes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow all group members a chance to speak by using a kitchen timer. Each person in turn sets the timer for approximately 5–10 minutes depending on the size of the group. Be flexible on those occasions when someone may need to take more than his or her share of the time. 	<p>Respond: Choose a stage of loss and imagine yourself there. How could another person best help you?</p>	<p>60 minutes</p>
	<p>Approximate total = 2 hours, 15 minutes</p>		

* Also available on the World Wide Web: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs>

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File: Family life 3

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Loss affects people differently

Activity 2A

Most husbands and wives recognize there are times when they are “at different places” in terms of development. Under normal circumstances these differences are acknowledged, usually talked about, and not viewed as a threat to the marriage.

When a couple is dealing with loss or threat of loss, “differences” in how a husband and wife are dealing with the situation can spell complication.

“Country” ... An example

A movie from the 1980s, “Country” offers an example of a husband and wife at two different stages as each tries to deal with the threatened loss of the farm. At first, both Jewel and Gil think there has been some “mistake.” It can’t be true that the corn check is a two-party check. They can’t be on “the list” at the elevator. When they receive a letter telling them they have 30 days to repay their debts, they can no longer deny what is happening.

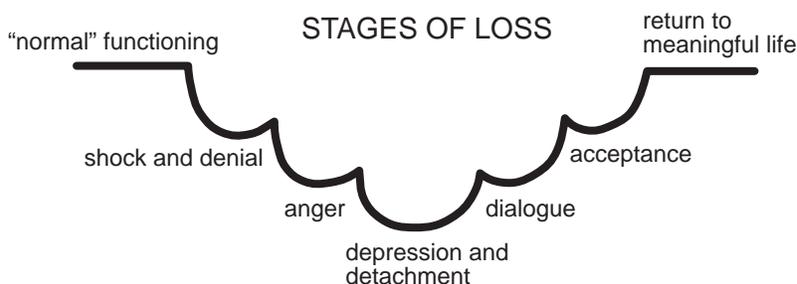
Jewel launches into action (informs neighbors of the family’s trouble and asks for their support and presence at the auction). She is upset not only with FmHA, but with her husband, Gil. “You’re a farmer. Your whole life has been hard times. If that’s the way you feel, we’ve already lost!”

Their marriage relationship during this time of crisis is complicated by the fact that the farm is Jewel’s father’s land. Jewel’s father says to her, “Gil’s the one who messed up, mismanaged it. This is our land and you see that it stays that way.”

Gil Ivy stays away from home and ignores the chores. After a drinking episode he physically abuses his son. On sale day, Gil returns home and acknowledges how much he needs his family.

Group discussion questions

1. Where is each person in the loss process? Gil? Jewel? Her father?
2. When were Gil and Jewel at different stages in the loss process?
3. Did being at different stages benefit or harm the family?



Different places: Benefit or betrayal

Activity 2B

Sometimes husbands or wives feel they are betraying their spouse if they are not both at the same place in the loss process. Sometimes the spouse does feel betrayed.

Form three small groups. Each group will discuss situations (1, 2 or 3) in which there are either differences or similarities between spouses in terms of adjustment to loss. Take 15 minutes.

Small group 1: Am I betraying my spouse?

Sometimes husbands or wives feel they are betraying their spouses if they are not both at the same place in the loss process. Here are two examples of this kind of thinking.

A. Wife: “If he’s down and depressed, I shouldn’t be thinking of ways to get on with life.”

- At what stage of loss is this wife? Her husband?
- What will likely happen if he remains as is and she continues to feel she’s betraying him by wanting to get on?
- What helping behaviors might be used in this situation? By whom?

B. Husband: “If she doesn’t admit there is a problem, how can I ask her not to buy things she feels are necessities?”

- At what stage of loss is this wife? Her husband?
- What will happen if she remains as is and he continues to feel he is betraying her when he asks her to curb spending?
- What helping behaviors might be used in this situation? By whom?

Small group 2: Is my spouse betraying me?

Sometimes a husband or wife does feel betrayed if his or her spouse is not at the same place in the loss process. Here are two examples of this kind of thinking.

A. Wife: “How dare he pretend there’s nothing wrong when we have little food in the house and children to feed!”

- At what stage of loss is this husband? His wife?
- What will happen if he remains as is and she continues to feel betrayed?
- What specific helping behaviors could be used in this situation? By whom?

B. Husband: “My wife is taking the easy way out. She’s down, cries all the time, and won’t go out. Meanwhile, I have to face lawyers and lenders alone. I’m tired of shouldering all the responsibility.”

- At what stage of loss is this wife? Her husband?
- What will happen if she remains as is and he continues to feel betrayed?
- What specific helping behaviors could be used in this situation? By whom?

Different places: Benefit or betrayal

Activity 2B, continued

Small group 3: Do our similarities benefit us?

Sometimes, it's couple similarities rather than differences that cause trouble! Here are two examples.

A. A family needs to analyze the farm operation and make some changes in order to continue farming. Both husband and wife assume things can go on just as always.

- At what stage of loss is the husband? Wife?
- Does the family benefit because husband and wife are at the same stage of loss?
- What will happen if each remains as is?
- What helping behaviors might be used in this situation? By whom?

B. A family needs help (food, fuel, etc.) and both husband and wife are depressed and withdrawn. The children have taken charge of daily chores.

- At what stage of loss is the husband? Wife?
- Does the family benefit because both are at the same stage of loss?
- What will happen if each remains as is?
- What helping behaviors might be used in this situation? By whom?

After small group discussion, come back together.

Group discussion

1. When can husband/wife differences in adjustment to loss benefit a family? Examples?
2. When are husband/wife differences in adjustment not beneficial to a family? Examples?
3. When can being at the same loss stage as a spouse be beneficial?
4. When can being at the same stage as a spouse not be beneficial?
5. What can one spouse do to help the other deal with shock, anger, or depression?
6. Do specific helping behaviors fit certain stages of loss?
7. Why might a spouse feel betrayed? Feel like a betrayer?
8. Do all people experience all stages of loss?
9. Do stages of loss necessarily occur in sequence as described?
10. Does "return to meaningful life" mean that things will be the same as they were before the loss occurred?

Different places: Benefit or betrayal

Activity 2B, continued

Possible answers to questions for group discussion

1. Families are better off when spouses are at different stages if one spouse has the energy to act when the other is too depressed to do anything. One spouse's anger or depression may help the other one to stop denying that there's a problem.
2. In general, differences in adjustment are not helpful when spouses interpret the difference as lack of caring or a sign of danger in the marriage.
3. Sometimes being in the same stage can offer comfort and a sense of understanding between spouses. It also may be helpful for both to be ready for dialogue or to reach the acceptance stage at about the same time.
4. If both people are too depressed to take action or seek help, there's a problem.
5. Talk with an angry or hurting spouse. Be there without being demanding.
6. Yes. In addition, dialogue is probably helpful at every stage. For instance, helping with daily routine tasks may be more helpful for someone in shock or depression than anger. Listening and caring without being judgemental are helpful at each stage.
7. When someone special doesn't acknowledge your feelings, it puts distance in the relationship. You feel like a betrayer when you pick up signals from your spouse that you are not understanding.
8. No.
9. No.
10. No.