

The Power of Gratitude in Grieving

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. - Philippians 4:8 (KJV)

The surest way out of a cycle of despair is to consciously call to mind the “whatsoevers” found in Philippians. Directing your attention to the good things in your life is one of the simplest ways of experiencing happiness. Numerous studies have shown that prayer, meditation, and practicing gratitude on a regular basis helps reduce stress levels and depression.

As you introduce these concepts and practices to people in your care, acknowledge their distress. Then express gratitude for them as people and for their willingness to allow you to bear witness to their pain. Encourage them to express their sorrows as well as engage in the skillful practice of gratitude as a means to live a richer, healthier life.

Exercise to acknowledge grief and pain

Direct your clients to think of the holidays and the emotions that it brings up for them. Use this exercise to lead them through their emotions of grief.

1. Think of your loss and cause of grief. Allow yourself to feel sad. Say the words you are feeling. If tears come, allow your feelings to flow with your tears. Your tears and words can be an expression of many emotions — your sadness, anger, fear, and longing.
2. Now picture inviting God into this space. Talk to God out loud about your loss. Be specific about how your loss is affecting you.
3. Sometimes we experience relief and feel better after prayer, at other times we don't. Remind yourself that grieving is a process that requires time. Remind yourself that God promises his presence and desires to heal you as you share your pain and sadness. Allow yourself to name and acknowledge any thoughts, feelings or memories that you're grateful for.

After acknowledging grief and inviting God into the pain, encourage clients to log their thoughts and practice this exercise once a week for a month. Then guide clients to practice gratitude with the following exercises.

Gratitude exercises – practice at least one of these daily for a month

Start each exercise with 60 seconds of deep breathing. Inhale deeply through your nose for 5 counts, pause, then exhale through pursed lips for 7 counts and pause again before inhaling.

1. Morning Coffee Gratitude. While you're having your first cup of coffee or tea, sit back and think of the things that you're thankful for. Here are a few examples:

- The warmth of the cup you're holding.
- The aroma of the drink.
- That first sip.
- The beautiful/ sunny/ dark/ rainy/ warm/ cold etc. morning.
- The beginning of a new day full of promise.
- The quiet just before the day officially starts.
- Anything else that comes to mind.

2. Mindfulness and Gratitude Through the 5 senses. Notice:

- **5 things that you can see.** Look around you and become aware of your environment. Try to pick out something that you don't usually notice.
- **4 things you can feel.** Bring attention to the things that you're currently feeling, like the texture of your clothing or the smooth surface of the table you're resting your hands on.
- **3 things that you can hear.** Listen for and notice things in the background that you don't normally notice. It could be the birds chirping outside or an appliance humming in the room.
- **2 things you can smell.** Bring attention to scents that you usually filter out, either pleasant or unpleasant. Catch a whiff of something in nature or food cooking in the kitchen.
- **1 thing you can taste.** Take a sip of a drink, chew gum, or notice the taste in your mouth.

3. Gratitude for People and Relationships. Choose one of the tasks below. Either:

- Write a thank you note to someone.
- Call a friend or close family member to check-in and chat.
- Visit a close friend or family member.
- Just notice and log perceived imperfections in another person with something you appreciate or admire about them.

End each exercise with deep breathing and then a prayer of gratitude to God. Let him know that you're grateful for this moment of pause, for the time that you've been given, for the energy to be present, awake, and alive. After each exercise, log the things that you're grateful for.