

Module 7

Figure 5: Loss Exercise

LIST YOUR...

5 Most prized possessions (material things)	5 Favorite activities	5 Most valuable body parts	5 Values that are most important to you	5 People you love the most

As I tell you this story, cross out as many items as I tell you.

Imagine: It is a lovely spring day - you know the kind, one of the first days when the snow has melted and the flowers are blooming up north or down here the temperatures are comfortable and the birds are singing.

You are young and successful and happy with your life.

You step in the shower anxious to get on with the day. While you soap yourself you discover a small lump on your neck and another in your breast.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

Probably swollen glands from your recent cold (premenstrual changes) you think, and ignore it and go on with your life.

Two and one-half weeks later it is still there.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

Probably cold returning - you've been busy, not resting, You've had cystic breasts, you rationalize and life goes on but something keeps nagging at you so you make an appointment to see your doctor.

CROSS OUT ONE ITEM

The doctor, after examining you and ordering a mammogram, she says, "I'm sure it's nothing but I'd like to biopsy it just in case, so we'll schedule you for surgery the end of the week."

CROSS OUT THREE ITEMS

You decide to have a biopsy (frozen section) done, and to go ahead with a mastectomy if the lump is malignant, though everyone assures you that it is not.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

You pull your way up through the fog in the recovery room and feel the mass of bandages on your chest. Your worst fears have been confirmed!

CROSS OUT FOUR ITEMS

You recover and have radiation treatment, just in case.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

Slowly you recover your strength and life returns to normal - almost.

It is spring again, two years later. You have a cold. You ignore it as usual but it doesn't go away and one morning, to your surprise, you find it difficult to breathe.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

Lung metastasis, you feel your world turn upside down again. That wonderful defense mechanism of denial must be let go. You begin chemotherapy and are very sick, weak and angry. You lash out at your family, doctors, friends. You want to live but you cannot eat.

CROSS OUT TWO ITEMS

One morning you do not have enough energy to sit in a chair and the doctor tells you the chemotherapy is not working and he wants to stop it.

CROSS OUT THREE ITEMS

It seems like life goes on around you in slow motion. Days and nights blur. How odd you think, staring at your bony hand, as your body deteriorates your spirit seems to be withdrawing also. You wonder if it's the pain medication or if it's the first taste of death but you do not have the energy to ask anyone.

CROSS OUT THE LAST TWO ITEMS

Source: Fauser, M., Lo, K., & Kelly, R. (1996). Trainer Certification Program [Manual]. Largo, FL: The Hospice Institute of the Florida Suncoast. Reprinted with permission.

Identify the stages and/or tasks of grief as experienced by the author.

Colors

See me RED with anger,
Out of control,
Life's unpredictableness shaking me.
How could he die?

I lash out at those who make life more difficult...
Those on the other end of a business phone call,
Who don't understand
Who make no effort to be kind.

Those who call, asking for his things,
Not out of memory, but out of greed.
How selfish and rude!
I scream the words...silently.

Even cards can make me see red;
"I know you are strong," they say.
I know I am, but please, let me be weak.
Just for now, just for a moment.

See me GREEN, taking control
My house will be in order.
The living room will be vacuumed and dusted.
The yard will be mowed, weeded and watered.

I laugh at myself, yet understand the need
To be in control...and those around me?
They are amused, I'm sure, but happy to oblige
And plunge into the work, beside me.

See me BLUE, lonely, missing him.
Needing him by my side, yearning for his presence.
Heart aching with a pain unknown before.
But now a constant companion...crushing pain,
I can't breathe. I rub my chest to no avail; the pain remains.

See me PURPLE, in a sea of tears.
Sobbing, the waves of despair roll in.
The pain in my heart becomes knife-like.
I think I cannot bear it another moment.

Then mercifully, the tide recedes.

See me YELLOW, calm, exhausted,
The knowledge of the goodness
Of our love flows into me.
I become aware that it is for eternity.
The memories, special and precious.
A treasure box of all we had, all were together.

His words, forever imprinted in his journal, on on-going gift
Telling me over and over again, of his love for me,
His "sweet companion."

See me BLACK, in the darkness, I am alone.
I am sinking into nothingness-a void.
No one can go home. Oh, it's so cold; it's so black.
I cry out loud, "It's black, I'm cold."
And, "Oh God, I'm afraid."

Arms hold me, and cradle me.
A candle is lit, to bring me back to the light,
To safety.

See me WHITE, without feeling.
Too tired to feel, too overwhelmed to care anymore.
If I care, and remember, the other colors will return.
I don't have the energy to be touched by the colors.

Oh, the RAINBOW...How it surrounds me
Bringing an awareness of both the
Heights and depths of joy and sorrow.

How I love the peaks, how I avoid the valleys,
And, yet, the valley gives me a beautiful view of the peak.
If I can only open my swollen eyes to see...
And bask in the glow of the colors.

My husband, Ted, died June 17, 1993

Source: Lyddon, R. (1996). Colors. In A. Gambill (Ed.), *Food for the soul*. Colorado Springs, CO:
Bereavement Publishing Inc.