Finding Meaning and Living with Metastatic Disease

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Our Services

THE AUSTIN CENTER FOR
Grief&Loss
Hope › Healing › Transformation







Kids'
Programs



Consultation

My Experience with Cancer

Personal:

- Cancer in both sets of grandparents, aunts, uncle, parents, stepmother
- Breast cancer: both grandmothers, aunts on both sides

Professional:

- Clients (past and current) experiencing metastatic breast cancer
- Caregivers of people who have been/are currently receiving treatment for cancer

Talking Points

- The Role of Healthy Grieving and Authentic Emotional Processing after a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer
- Meaning Making: What does this diagnosis mean for you?
- Myths and Pitfalls
- Understanding and communicating your needs
- When to seek out help from a mental health professional



Notes on Grief

- Grief is universal
- Grief is not just about death; it can be about loss or unwanted change
- MBC diagnosis often involves grief
- Healthy grieving can lead to positive change and growth

Healthy Grieving vs. Toxic Positivity

HEALTHY GRIEVING

- Allows you to have your full emotional experience
- Allows you to process an altered future
- Allows for meaning making, legacy building, spiritual/relational development, personal growth, adaptation

TOXIC POSITIVITY

- Encourages people to "think positively" at the expense of emotional authenticity
- Labels some emotions as "bad"
- Unfair, Unrealistic Expectations: Hero, "So Strong", Win/Lose, etc.
- Implication of blame/failure
- Promotes numbing/denying/walling off "bad feelings" **Myth: you can selectively numb emotions**



Tips for Authentic Emotional Processing

- Recognize and honor the complex emotions involved in processing the diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer.
- Think about feelings as “parts” allows all feelings to have a voice, YOU are not your fear, YOU have a part of you that is afraid.
- Myth: “I AM afraid.” Truth: A part of me is afraid.”
- Listening to all parts can help you take care of yourself. What does that part need? (Fear: Hug? Reassurance? More Information?)
- Remember: the energy it takes to stifle strong emotion is exhausting!
- Myth: you must silence or ignore the internal voices. Truth: if you bring emotions into the light, and listen with compassion, it will often make them feel more manageable and cut down on ambushes.

You May Want to Consider:

- Designated Time/Grief Container (Grounding, Containment)
- Journaling (written or oral), Letters
- Meditation/ Mindfulness, Prayer, Art, Walking
- Regular time with a certain friend or a loved one
- Processing in a group

To fully process our grief, we must first understand what it is we have lost and acclimate to our new reality.


Three Questions to Promote
Healthy Grieving/Meaning Making

What is Lost?

- Assumptive World View (Expectations for future)
- Body Changes: Hair, Breasts, Identity
- Control of your own schedule (Treatment/Medical Involvement)
- Potential for change in life expectancy
- Role changes

What Is Left?

What are my resources? (Family, Friends, Access to Good Medical Care, Faith Family, etc.)

Personal Strengths/Abilities?

Taking stock of what is most important to you now

Acceptance of “New Normal”

What is Next/Possible?

Personal Priorities

Relationships: Repair? Reclaim? Reshape? Renew?

Prioritizing and Re-imagining Goals/Dreams (Examples)

Experiences (Embrace the Mess!!)

Dream Eulogy Writing Exercise

Myth: thinking/talking about death is unhealthy

Honest Communication with Self and Others

- Listen to your parts, determine what you need most, communicate clearly and try to be patient.
- Don’t expect people to anticipate your needs.
- Needs will change from day to day, even hour to hour.
- What do I need and from whom? (**Myth: you can get all your needs met by your romantic partner/close family**)



- Make a Coping Card
- Consider External Support: (Therapist/Spiritual Leader?)
- *Audience Questions about Communication*

When to Seek Professional Mental Health Support



Depression vs. Grief



Severe Anxiety/Panic Attacks



PTSD/Trauma (flashbacks, nightmares, rumination, hypervigilance, etc.)

A diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer can feel frightening, and overwhelming. While it is true that we cannot control many of the things that happen to us in our lives, we can have some control over how we respond.

By honestly and authentically processing our grief and allowing ourselves to experience the full measure of our emotions, we can be more fully present and engaged with our lives. This will allow us to better understand our values, our priorities, our desires, and ourselves. When we understand ourselves better, we can communicate better with our loved ones.



The capacity to make meaning from our experience is what makes us human.

- Viktor Frankl

All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.

- J.R.R. Tolkien

Who am I, again?

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Questions?