Support Group: Acquainted with Grief-Growing through Ambiguous Loss

November 18, 2025

Announcements

- Next Support Group is Dec. 9 "Managing the Holidays with Chronic Illness: Solutions and Strategies" https://batemanhornecenter.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEsd-2qqTwsGNE6vnygU1W0bjCWko76zfz9
- Subscribe to emails: https://batemanhornecenter.org/outreach/newsletter/
- Clinical Care Guide: https://batemanhornecenter.org/clinical-care-guide/
- Support BHC's mission: https://givebutter.com/BHCSupport

The following resources and anecdotes were shared by attendees and do not necessarily reflect BHC guidance or endorsement.

Timothy Weymann, LCSW, introduced the topic by describing ambiguous loss, a type of grief common in chronic illness. Unlike traditional grief, where a loss is clear and final, chronic illness involves ongoing, uncertain losses. People may not know what abilities will return or fade over time, making the grief continual and unresolved. This ambiguity is a central emotional challenge for those living with chronic illness.

Guiding Questions

1. What are you currently grieving in relation to your chronic illness?

2. What are the ways you've reclaimed what you've lost?

3. What helps you let go and move forward?

Timothy's Shared Wisdom

- Losses can also be associated with gains.
- Ambiguous loss can include grieving the loss of a previously privileged or majority identity. Becoming ill or disabled may expose someone to discrimination and ignorance for the first time, while others experience it as an

added layer on top of existing marginalized identities. This shift in identity and the prejudice that can come with it is an important part of the grief process.

- We can recognize that when we grieve who we were "supposed to be" a lot of what we are grieving is an idea; a projection of ourselves into the future. An idea of who we would be, but that never was a reality. When we recognize this it can soften our attachment to our denial and we can let go more so we can have more emotional freedom.
- Sometimes we are put in a position where we are picking our pain. Life doesn't always present a good choice and bad choice, sometimes it is a least bad choice. It can be helpful to normalize that.
- Illness brings a lot of invitations along with the losses. One invitation is for us to get very intentional about what we believe. Including what we believe about ourselves as ill people as well as our life as ill people.
- Grief isn't just sadness and loss, those are starting places. Grief also becomes an active process of accepting and adapting.
- Sometimes when we say we are grieving, we are actually ruminating. Ruminating is repeatedly focusing on negative experiences and their consequences. While it's important to acknowledge and honor losses, the goal is to gently shift toward acceptance and adaptation rather than staying stuck in negative loops.
- We're invited to ask ourselves whether we are larger than any single experience, symptom, or role we've ever held. Suffering often increases when our identity becomes narrow or rigid when we cling to "I must always be this kind of person." Broadening our sense of self can reduce the pain that comes from that constricted mindset.
- A simple low-cost intervention can be gratitude.

Participant Verbal Comments

- Participant shared that they've experienced many ambiguous losses, including the death of their son, and now live with moderate to severe long COVID. They described the practices that help them cope. As a singer and drum practitioner, they've found that singing, humming, and drumming stimulate the vagus nerve and noticeably calm their body lowering heart rate and improving focus.

- Participant reflected on ambiguous loss, noting that even the death of a loved one feels ambiguous because their presence is still felt. They described multiple losses from chronic illness but also shared that these losses led to unexpected growth. Slowing down has helped them notice and appreciate life more deeply, creating a balance of difficult losses and meaningful gains.
- Participant shared that “ambiguous loss” resonates deeply because they’re grieving the loss of their imagined future. They’ve had to let go of long-held roles and confront both the fear and freedom of being on their own. While it’s painful to feel separate from “normal” life and to navigate relationships without disclosing their illness, they also feel newly empowered to rediscover who they are and build a life on their own terms. This stage is both a burden and a liberation, and they’re working to embrace the constant change that comes with it.
- Participant shared that living with chronic illness has led to a deep sense of loss of abilities, social connections, and a sense of future. They feel isolated in their senior community because few people, including local doctors, understand their condition. Physical limitations prevent them from engaging in activities or traveling, which has contributed to feeling forgotten. While the changes have been overwhelming, they expressed gratitude for finding functional medicine providers who validate their experience and offer support.
- Participant described both the grief and the small ways they try to reclaim what they’ve lost. Staying connected with long-time friends through brief calls is meaningful, but also painful afterward because it reminds them of the lives they can no longer share. They’ve found comfort in short, engaging TV shows that offer a sense of connection without triggering grief. They emphasized doing what they can handle in the moment and shared a recent insight that helps them cope: choosing to “recommit” to themselves not to the life they once imagined, but to who they are now which has brought a sense of direction and peace.
- Participant shared grief around the possibility of having children. They always wanted to be a parent, but as their illness has worsened, they fear the physical impact pregnancy could have. Their partner still deeply wants children, which adds pressure and fear about the future of their relationship. They’re grieving the sense that whatever choice they make; protecting their health or pursuing parenthood comes with a painful loss.

- Participant described grieving the loss of the identities that once defined them and the painful shift into being "the sick person." Their illness coincided with an empty nest and the sudden loss of their job, which deeply shook their sense of self. They spoke about the frustration of limitations, the inability to commit to anything, and the feeling of not being able to "fix" their own situation.
- Participant is grieving the loss of coping strategies they once relied on. Because of declining health, they can't use those strategies anymore and feel like they're running out of options. As a longtime Buddhist practitioner, they feel called to sit with their loneliness and fear directly rather than fixing or filling it with distractions.
- Participant reflected on the deep losses from their illness, especially the loss of identity tied to their job and active lifestyle, leaving them questioning their value. At the same time, being forced into solitude created unexpected gifts: they've become more self-connected, more creative, and have developed an art practice that's led to exhibits with others' help. They're holding both the grief and the gifts that this illness has brought.
- Participant described joining a cancer support group being diagnosed with cancer and feeling shaken by hearing others in active treatment describe side effects like fatigue and brain fog as "unbearable," even though those symptoms were milder than what the speaker lives with every day. This contrast felt isolating, confusing, and hard to articulate, an ambiguous grief. At the same time, it was also validating, highlighting just how severe their own daily limitations are and affirming that their experience is real and not exaggerated.
- Participant shared that they've always been a driven overachiever whose identity revolved around being "on" for others. Because of illness, they've lost the ability to present themselves the way they once did and can now only go out in the world in short, fearful bursts. Their looks, energy, and presence have changed, and they feel judged and exposed.
- Participant shared grief over losing the ability to work due to chronic illness. To reclaim some of what was lost, they gradually began walking outdoors, which has become restorative helping regulate their mood, reconnect with nature, and regain a sense of freedom to engage in daily activities and social connections.

- Participant described a long journey through grief and depression to reach acceptance. Daily gratitude and meditation practices, including a smile-based meditation, help regulate emotions and foster acceptance of "what is."
- Participant shared they find support in tools like the Calm app, self-soothing practices, and carefully balancing hope and information from friends with similar illnesses. They also noted the challenge of navigating the unpredictable ups and downs of their illness.

Participant Comments from the Chat

- "Grieving:
    - a. My ability to physically do what I 'feel' like doing.
    - b. My energy.
    - c. My ability to travel.
    - d. Being more social.
    - e. My confidence
    - f. Ability to be eager and enthusiastic without crashing
    - g. Loss of my career and my career goals
    - h. Loss of option to be independent

  Ways I've reclaimed:
    - a. Finding different outlets
    - b. Reevaluating my priorities
    - c. Finding creative ways to try to get income.

  Helps me move forward:
    - What I've learned about patience.
    - Letting go of things that used to bother me, worry me, cause me anxiety.
    - Learning that what I'm feeling is TRUE which helps me blow off comments, digs, etc."
- "Grief of losing my hyper-independence, it was a critical asset that allowed me to break a pretty huge cycle of generational trauma. Needing help for so much of my daily life stuff is hard."
- "Q1: stayed with family recently due to leak in home the family members I needed to lie down most of the time I was with them which is very different from my 'normal' behavior lost parts of my relationship/usefulness/engaging."

- “I am grieving what I know my body is capable of or used to be capable of. I have gained a spiritual revolution with me.”
- “This illness taught me to put myself first, my health first and to say “no”. I am not a yes gal anymore. This illness also taught me to cherish the smaller things in life - time to enjoy a tea…watching a bird or enjoying a beautiful dinner etc.”
- “One of the ways I help myself through LC and my other grief is keeping a journal. One for physical symptom tracking and one for mental health (just word docs).”
- “I’ve lost most the things I enjoyed doing and the people I thought I liked being with. However, my Golden Retriever helps me a great deal. I now know who my true friends are. I do what I want to do to the best of my ability and when. I’m extremely spiritual, too.”
- “My grief right now: loss of my social network and family who gaslight or avoid me. Being able to just do the simple things like go for a walk or dance at a powwow or hang out and laugh with friends.”
- “I stopped explaining my misery. It's too hard for people that love me to hear. I sense their helplessness and fear. I have no fear of crossing over to spirit world. Still fighting for cure. The loss we have experienced a huge loss. I too have lots of spirit world support. My living family is awesome but they are living busy lives while I stay in survival mode. Every day a blessing.”
- “Zoom is the next best thing to being with friends and family in person...I use it for some of my connections too.”
- “One of my biggest griefs is that my kids were very young when I got sick - they have no memories of a healthy mom and I can't do with them what I want to do.”
- “Amen, switching our lens on how we view our strengths & weaknesses and what's important to is is a big help!”
- “Identity is so huge, speaking personally as an Indigenous person who did my DNA to confirm that (I was adopted). And we do hold many identities in our lives. So weird when one goes away or shifts.”
- “I just realized how hard being disabled with CFS would be if you’re still young and haven't had kids yet. What a difficult place to be in. I'm almost 60. Kids grown 21 and 24. Was waiting for phase 3 of my life...looks like it's going to be much different than I imagined. I'm a teacher been disabled almost 4 yrs. I grieve my students.”

- “True. Grief can include so many emotions, even positive ones sometimes.”
- “The essence of me...my soul is still the same.”
- “I've gotten used to being on my own. I like winning EVERY argument! 🤣”
- “Yes really allowing the feelings AND it's good to remember we don't have to feel it ALL right now. Set a timer as needed. PEM can hit when we feel bigger feelings if we don't watch our capacity.”
- “Learning to let go of your attachment to your self image and accept.”
- “The loss of coping mechanisms due to health is hard.”
- “We are valuable & worthy just by being here. Nobody else is YOU, no one has your lens, your opinions, your ideas, your viewpoints, your humor, your heart! You help THIS community by sharing.”
- “I appreciate the idea of suffering also making an opening, being an invitation… it's hard to see it when your in the midst of sometimes unbearable pain both mentally and physically. invitation to be present and stay when it's hard, to be curious about yourself and practice compassion. I feel the biggest gift of being sick has been seeing how much courage it takes to be sick in our society, and learning to embrace my identity as disabled has helped me also embrace other identities I've rejected since I've always had, ie having chronic health issues, queerness..”
- “One of the things tools in my toolbox for my worst grief days is to pick a movie from a long list of comedies that I’ve created. Laughing about some ridiculous Steve Martin movie is often a good reset for me. If you’d like a copy of my list this link will allow you to clone my list in your own Google drive! 💖”
    - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1flGQguFRYMzZTSb9gDKzz7UBub0bcPuxCX0nkssyfcQ/copy
- “Treatments can vary so greatly and each individual handles it differently. Hard to compare pains.”
- “Grief is such a huge part of this illness and it's hard to realize that it goes on a long time. I've had this for over 30+yrs and I still go through grief in different layers. It's really hard.”
- “We NEED to grieve who we no longer are and change our perspective to what we have to offer now. What CAN we do? It's not easy, but a worthwhile journey -- one step at a time. Show yourself grace.”

- “If you’ve been way too isolated lately - open this link to join my WhatsApp Chronic Illness Group Chat!:”
    - https://chat.whatsapp.com/FqORYBh1PWOGS7E9HlZFFJ
- “I like that: "You can't be grateful and resentful at the same time"”
- “We can hold many emotions all at once, contrary to what the books like to say.”
- “I just want say to all - keep HOPE in your heart. It is something that nobody can take from you and is yours to keep. I have improved over the years after being in bed for many years. Cheers.”
- “Oh yes, Yoga Nidra practice on YouTube is definitely something I definitely try to implement every day...it temporarily relieves symptoms.”

Tiny Triumphs

- “I joined people in the building to watch a game; it was good to be sociable.”
- “Canceled everything and spent the whole day resting & caring for my SELF.”
- “Launching my new Etsy site!”
- “Made it to my son’s weightlifting meet and to the hair salon.”
- “Identified a contractor to repair the leak in my roof.”
- “I planted a few pansies a friend bought me weeks ago.”
- “My partner and I made it to a music event on Saturday - film followed by Q&A - achieved through resting mostly for the whole day.”
- “Went shopping! Felt like I was a healthy person for 30 minutes.”
- “Recovered from my hospital appointment, not much of a PEM attack for a change.”
- “Wrapped orders today (I have an online store) and it wasn’t bad at all.”
- “Received a certification to become a Volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for abused & neglected kids in my community!”
- “Planted onions.”
- “Took my car in for service and went to lunch with a friend while it was getting worked on.”
- “Met friends for dinner Friday due to resting all day.”
- “Attended my granddaughter's soccer tournament.”
- “Finally got to Lowes and got my winterization materials, up next is putting it up”
- “Visited beloved family who I have not had energy for years to travel to.”

- "Attended my father's memorial without crashing, including travel, family, emotions, and lots of upright time."

Resources

- To contact Timothy Weymann, L.C.S.W. directly:
  - Email: timothy.weymann@counselingmail.com
  - Website: www.timothyweymann.com

Crisis Resources

- Dial 988
  - What Happens When You Call 988? (Article)
- Dial 911
- Crisis Text Line
- Crisis resource page (BHC)

Potential Financial Assistance Resources

- Healthwell Foundation
- Patient Access Network Foundation
- Needy Meds
- My Good Days

Support Groups (alphabetical order)

Lived-Experience Support Groups

- Action for ME (online youth support based in UK)
  - https://www.actionforme.org.uk/18-and-under/support-for-under-18/join-our-young-peoples-community/
- BHC Support Group 2nd and 3rd Tuesday at 1 pm MST
  - https://batemanhornecenter.org/events/
- Black COVID-19 Survivors
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/bcsalliance/
- CFS/ME Friends
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/CFSMEFRIENDS
- Health Stories Collaborative Creative Meetups

  - https://www.healthstorycollaborative.org/creativemeetups
- International ME Support Chat
  - 11am-1pm EST/ 5 -7pm GMT / 3-5am Melbourne time & 9-11pm EST/ 3-5am GMT/ 2-4pm Melbourne time
  - https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84362703704?pwd=bfKmegaCLNhS6KwOUve7fkcsQjs7sB.1
- Invisible Youth Support Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/invisibleyouthgroup
- Long Hauler Advocacy Project
  - https://www.longhauler-advocacy.org/support-us
- Long COVID Families
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/4345929175466216
- Massachusetts ME and FM Association Small Group Chats
  - https://www.massmecfs.org/
- #MEAction Living w/ME Support Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/211058135999671
- #MEAction Long COVID Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/205703087068863
- #MEAction Seniors Connect
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/391269901334695/?ref=pages_profile_groups_tab&source_id=1408335399448862
- #MEAction Pillow Crafters (Group Crafting Sessions)
  - https://www.meaction.net/pillow-crafters/
- #MEAction Additional Groups
  - https://www.meaction.net/groups/
- ME/CFS Social Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/1202428297198122
- ME/CFS phone support group
  - Occurs on Saturday nights at 8pm, EST.
  - Call: 609-746-1155. Punch in: 915110#. Group is open to all.
- State Specific Long Hauler Facebook Groups
  - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1vMNCrONg1oTy5QPzajNUJffu0gk4eBR4o585NosVgsk/edit#gid=0
- Surviving with ME

  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/695317212152964
- The Mighty Group Directory
  - https://themighty.com/groupdirectory/
- Utah COVID-19 Long Haulers
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/2619858348232191
- The Yarrow Collective's Alternative to Suicide group is a weekly Zoom meeting. It's a free resource for folks who are struggling that is nonclinical peer support. They also have chronic illness and disability support groups.
  - https://www.yarrowcollective.org/

Caregiver Support

- Caregiver Wisdom is an online venture to support chronic illness caregivers. Current free offerings include: a monthly support group, a free online community that's off of social media, and a blog with helpful posts.
- A support group for partner caregivers (please note all caregivers are welcome) takes place the first Sunday of each month at **12 p.m. PT / 3 p.m. ET.** Focuses on monthly topics and has small breakout rooms for closer community connection. To be added to the email list, contact Kim at kim.mecfs@gmail.com.
- #MEAction's support group for all family caregivers takes place the third Saturday of each month at 10:30 p.m. PT / 1:30 p.m. ET. To be added to the email list, contact Denise at caregiver@meaction.net.
- If you are on Facebook, #MEAction has a Facebook group for caregivers
- If you are on Discord, Nia has started a channel for ME/Long COVID caregivers.