

ESCAPISM

How Does It Help? How Does It Hinder?

A Topics Around Grief Discussion Workshop

Saturday August 24, 2019

Facilitator's Notes for the Session

Definitions:

- **Escapism** is the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy. "Virtual reality offers a form of escapism."
- **Escapism** is the avoidance of unpleasant, boring, arduous, scary, or banal aspects of daily life. It can also be used as a term to define the actions people take to help relieve persistent feelings of depression or general sadness.
- **Escapism** is the use of imagination, entertainment, art, music, celebration and recreation to transcend the mundane or unpleasant realities of daily life. It is often portrayed negatively as avoidance of problems that require attention.

Questions:

1. What do we want to escape from?

2. How do people escape?

Some examples of how people escape:

- Sudoku
- Sport
- Alcohol
- TV
- Scrabble
- Mowing
- Comfort food
- Physical contact

3. What can be bad about escaping?

4. What can be good about escaping?

Flow Experiences – see hand out (*See Page 3 of this document*)

NOTES FROM THE SESSION

Facilitator Andrew Weatherhead

Notes compiled by Jenny Purvis

12 people attended

The participants were welcomed and the topic was introduced. The aim of the workshop being a discussion forum distinct from a formal grief meeting was explained so that the topic could be explored through personal sharing as well as underpinned by research based information and theory introduced by the group facilitator. Two handouts were presented in the course of the afternoon. See attached.

1. the concept of flow
2. the difference between trauma and grief

The idea of Escaping from ones grief was introduced with the consensus that it was something we sought to achieve in various ways as a distraction from feelings of grief.

The large group was divided into smaller groups of 3 or 4 to brainstorm the activities/ experiences individuals engaged in which gave a sense of escape. Each group came up with a list of possible pursuits which is only a beginning to the many possibilities. The lists included: gambling, food TV, comedy, reality "whatever", travel, sleep, distraction, overwork, shopping, spending, alcohol, ritual (compulsive obsessive), exercise, tunnel vision of trying to do anything, disassociation, projects, holidays, walking, gym, social media, surfing the computer, friends outings, studying, work, art, craft, music, gardening, being in nature, movies, research, family history, reading, voluntary work, U3A, listening to others stories, mindless games, drugs (prescribed or substance abuse), family, soduko, dancing, learning new things, dancing, new home renovations, pets, sex, cooking, films, challenging tasks, journaling, faith...

The group reconvened and participants counted how many of the listed activities were part of their ways to escape. Many people used up to 15 of the listed activities. Brief discussion included the type of things that were helpful in early stages or peak experiences of grief, and those people engaged with further along in their grief journey. Discussion also developed the observation that while most activities were positive and helpful, if taken to extreme many could be harmful.

The concept of Flow was introduced. In summary the experience of flow comes from engaging in activities and experiences which are absorbing and allow the individual to focus immediately on the task at hand, thus experiencing release or escape from underlying issues while so absorbed. The characteristics of flow were listed and with these aspects in mind, participants looked again at their own activities to identify which incorporated most of the elements leading to the experience of flow. A participant contributed that "grief can take away future and bring painful memories of the past, so you have to live in the moment. Learn to be."

The Facilitator introduced information on Trauma and Grief as being different experiences. Grief did not always have trauma associations and could involve helpful memories. Trauma had the effect of causing people to feel "stuck" or "trapped in time". The facilitator suggested

discussing trauma may be too painful of personal. A more general response affirmed the depth of trauma experience and how this could complicate grief. The experience of sleeplessness from continually reliving the trauma was described by one participant who developed coping strategies through psychiatric intervention which helped manage the processing of trauma.

The Facilitator concluded the discussion with the invitation to seek support of the session raised further issues and thanked all for participating.

Flow experiences – finding enjoyment and replenishing yourself

In his book “The Psychology of happiness”, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi talks about the experience of flow. The characteristics of “flow experiences” are that people typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious and at the peak of their abilities. Emotional problems seem to disappear and there is an exhilarating feeling of transcendence.

While people are performing such activities, they may have the experience of “losing time”. When they have completed the activity, they may be surprised at how long the activity has taken and they will feel refreshed and energised. Most people achieve flow by accident in their lives.

Flow can be purposefully achieved. This experience of enjoyment has 8 major components:

1. The experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing.
2. We must be able to concentrate on what we are doing.
3. Concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals.
4. The task provides immediate feedback.
5. We act with a deep but effortless involvement.
6. Enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions.
7. Concern for the self disappears, yet (paradoxically) the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over.
8. The sense of duration of time is altered. Hours can pass by in minutes and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours.

The combination of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to feel it.

Some examples:

- Umpiring netball
- Doing something for the children
- Walking in the bush or in the shopping centre
- Sudoku
- Some TV
- Gardening
- Putting vinyls on to CDs

The value of knowing about Flow activities is to make sure you include them in a routine for yourself, perhaps daily.

This information has been prepared by Andrew Weatherhead based on information provided by TCFV member Barbara Dickson.