

"BRIEF" THERAPY: A GRIEF COUNSELING METHOD FOR MANAGED CARE...



1. "HI."

One of the shortest, friendliest words in our language. "Hi" develops instant rapport and acknowledges the mourner efficiently. (Avoid polysyllabic "Hellos" or "Good afternoons"; they consume too much time.)

2. "WHO DIED?"

THIS CLOSED-ENDED QUESTION GETS STRAIGHT TO THE POINT, ALLOWING THE MOURNER TO (QUICKLY) TELL HER STORY. ENCOURAGE THE MOURNER TO STRING TOGETHER ALL THE PERTINENT FACTS INTO ONE SENTENCE: "MY 42-YEAR-OLD HUSBAND OF 10 YEARS, FRED, DIED OF CANCER THREE MONTHS AGO, LEAVING ME TO CARE FOR OUR 6-YEAR-OLD SON JACK AND 8-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER HANNAH." AVOID ASKING THE OPEN-ENDED "HOW ARE YOU?" - TALK ABOUT A PANDORA'S BOX OF THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

3. "I'M SO SORRY!"

This phrase communicates empathy and concern. You are sorry, after all. Look meaningfully into the mourner's eyes as you say this and if you've done a good job of building rapport in your 5 minutes together, reach out and pat her hand.

4. "THERE, THERE."

A USEFUL PHRASE WHEN THE "I'M SO SORRY!" LINE ELICITS WEeping. "THERE, THERE" DIPLOMATICALLY SAYS "AGAIN, I'M SORRY, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE CRYING IN MY OFFICE, SO STOP."

6. "TAKE CARE."

A COMPASSIONATE YET FIRM CLOSER FOR THE SESSION. SOUNDS POLITE AND EMPATHETIC, BUT THIS PHRASE ALSO SUBTLY PUTS THE BURDEN OF HEALING BACK ON THE MOURNER, AS IN "YOU TAKE YOUR CARES AND WORK ON THEM ON YOUR OWN, BECAUSE WE'RE FINISHED HERE."

5. "TIME HEALS ALL WOUNDS."

This useful cliché promises the mourner that she will heal from this loss, giving her hope for the future. However, healing takes time and time is something the two of you don't have together, so move on to step 6.

"BRIEF" THERAPY, as described above, is economical, efficient and healing therapy for mourners in the managed care setting. TOTAL SESSION TIME: 10 MINUTES.