

AMBIGUOUS LOSS (ambiguousloss.com)

With ambiguous loss, there is no closure; the challenge is to learn how to live with the ambiguity. Pauline Boss

Four Questions about Ambiguous Loss:

1) How does it differ from ordinary loss? Ambiguous loss differs from ordinary loss in that there is no verification of death or no certainty that the person will come back or return to the way they used to be.

2) Why does it matter? Ambiguous loss freezes the grief process and prevents closure, paralyzing couple and family functioning. For more information, please refer to Pauline's books, "Ambiguous Loss" and her most recent book, "Loss, Trauma, and Resilience".

3) How does one ease its effects? The six guidelines for resiliency while having to live with ambiguous loss are detailed in, "Loss, Trauma, and Resilience". As described in Dr. Boss's cyclical model, they are:

- Finding Meaning
- Tempering Mastery
- Reconstructing Identity
- Normalizing Ambivalence
- Revising Attachment
- Discovering Hope

4) What are the types of ambiguous loss? There are two types of ambiguous loss situations.

Type One occurs when there is physical absence and psychological presence. These include situations when a loved one is physically missing or bodily gone. Catastrophic examples of such ambiguous losses include kidnapping and missing bodies in the context of war, terrorism ethnic cleansing, genocide, or natural disasters such as earthquake, flood, and tsunami. More common examples of this type of ambiguous loss are situations of absent parents due to divorce, giving up a baby to adoption, and physical contact with parents and siblings due to immigration.

In **Type Two**, there is physical presence and psychological absence. In this type of ambiguous loss, the person you care about is psychologically absent-- that is, emotionally or cognitively missing. Such ambiguous loss can occur from Alzheimer's disease and other dementias; traumatic brain injury; AIDS, autism, depression, addiction, or other chronic mental or physical illnesses that take a loved one's mind or memory away.

For more information on both types of ambiguous loss-- and their overlap-- see "Introduction" in my latest book, **Loss, Trauma, and Resilience**, Norton, 2006.