

Appendix K: Practical 8A

Role-play 2: Loss and Grief Support with Taylor Grey

Participant's Briefing Instructions

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Instructions for Role-play Volunteer (Taylor Grey)

These are the instructions for the person helping the student with Role-Play 2 by acting in the role of the client. You must use the following information to assist you in your interactions with the student during the role-play. The role-play will include the student conducting an initial counselling session with you. While you are encouraged to use your creativity and judgement during the role-play, follow the instructions below.

Please note that the gender of the volunteer doesn't need to match the gender of the character they will be playing as long as the volunteer can accurately portray the character as described in the following instructions.

Please note: This role-play focuses on loss and grief and may be upsetting or triggering for some individuals. Please consider your suitability for participating in this role-play before continuing. If you require support, a helpline is available from Lifeline (13 11 14), and counsellors and other mental health professionals can provide support.

Background Information

You are Taylor Grey, a 35-year-old who is seeing a counsellor for the first time to help deal with the grief surrounding your mother's recent death. You are happily married to Andrew (aged 37) and have one child, Emily (aged 4). Your husband is a manager at a large software engineering firm, and you work part-time as a medical receptionist. You have enough money to live comfortably and are happy with your career and family.

However, the past couple of years have been incredibly stressful for you. Your mother, Martha (62), was diagnosed with aggressive lung cancer two years ago. Although your mother used to smoke regularly, the diagnosis was still a massive shock to you, as she quit smoking five years ago when you became pregnant with Emily. You and your mother have always been very close.

She raised you as a single mother, working round-the-clock shifts as a nurse to provide for you. Consequently, you have always looked up to her and relied heavily upon her for advice and support during your adult years, particularly in raising your daughter, Emily. Over the past year and a half, your mother has undergone various treatments for her cancer, including chemotherapy, which made her extremely sick and took a massive toll on her body.

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During this time, your mother moved in with you and your husband, and you took an extended leave of absence from your job so that you could be at home to care for her. However, none of the treatments or surgeries the doctors recommended were effective, and your mother's cancer worsened.

Six months ago, your mother decided that she couldn't face any more surgeries or chemotherapy, and thus all treatments were ceased, and her doctors shifted focus towards providing palliative care. You disagreed with this decision and tried to convince her to continue the treatments, but she was adamant that she was in too much pain and weak to continue. Her health rapidly deteriorated over the next few months, and she died one month ago.

Since your mother's death, you have experienced intense, ongoing grief and sadness over her loss. Every morning, you wake up with disbelief and sadness that she is no longer there. You feel incredibly guilty that you could not convince her to continue treatment and often find yourself preoccupied with thoughts about what you could have done differently to care for her better.

You have forced yourself to return to work part-time to regain some sense of "normalcy", but you cannot function correctly. Concentrating and focusing on tasks or making even the most straightforward decisions makes it extremely difficult. You always feel fatigued. However, you find sleeping extremely difficult and often wake up very early. You are also crying a lot and have started isolating yourself from others, as you feel like they can't relate to what you are going through. Your friend Andrew is concerned about you and has urged you to attend counselling to help you cope with your grief.

During the role-play:

Some specific instructions about things you must say/do during the role-play:

- At the beginning of the role-play, the student will greet you, introduce themselves and welcome you – you should respond naturally to any small talk they make.
- When the student starts asking you why you have attended counselling, you should reply that you have come to counselling at your husband's urging because you are struggling with the recent death of your mother. Then, use the information provided in the "background character information" to help flesh out the conversation and to respond to the counsellor's follow-up questions about your loss and your experience of grief. Respond in a way that comes to you naturally based on the questions asked while using the background information. Note: don't simply read this information out – instead, respond in a manner that makes sense to the conversation you are having with the student.
- At some point during the conversation, while describing the story of your loss or your grief, you should become very distressed and overwhelmed with emotion, sobbing uncontrollably and hyperventilating. The student will then ask you to perform a mental or physical "grounding" exercise – you must respond by complying with the student's

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instructions, gradually calming down until you are restored to “normal”. If the student asks if you are able or willing to continue the session, you should reply.

- Towards the end of the session, the student will present some options for organisations and support groups that might be useful for you. Listen to the student’s explanation of these options. When asked, you should indicate that you have understood these options and select whichever option sounds most appealing. For example, if the student suggests the “Helping Hearts” support group, you might choose this, reasoning that you would like to talk to other people who have gone through similar circumstances.
- At the end of the session, the student will ask you if there is anything further you wish to discuss. You must respond by indicating nothing further you want to discuss. When the student affirms your hard work in the session and thanks you for coming, you should thank them in return. This will signal the end of the role-play.