Personal Death Awareness

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Personal Death awareness
Purpose: To provide participants with an opportunity to explore and reflect upon their own finitude and mortality and discover how this awareness affects their living, relating and caring for others.

Premise: Our attitudes, values, fears etc (those that are both in and out of our awareness) surrounding our own dying and death, can and do have a profound effect on the quality of our living and the quality of our care for others.

Objectives: 
- To enable participants to examine their own PDA
- To heighten one’s own awareness of attitudes, values fears etc. surrounding one’s own dying and death
- To enable participants to begin to explore how their PDA or lack of it, enhances or inhibits their ability to care for others who are imminently dying
- To deepen one’s appreciation for life

Major Methods: Experiential exercises – reflection and discussion

Outline: Personal death awareness
Four ways to discover our attitudes, values and fears about our own death and dying exercises
Personal Death Awareness

The confronting of death gives the most positive reality to life itself. It makes the individual existence real, absolute and concrete. Death is the one fact of life which is not relative, but absolute, and my awareness of this gives my existence and what I do each hour an absolute quality.

Rollo May M.D.
Personal Death Awareness

Four ways to discover our attitudes, values and fears about our own dying and death

1. Die
2. Experience the dying and death of another
3. Face a life threatening experience
4. Reflect, contemplate, fantasize about your own dying and death
Personal Death Awareness

• Each one of us has to learn to adjust consciously to the fact of death (the inevitability of it we all acknowledge intellectually but often deny or refuse to face emotionally)
• My advice from personal experience is to make a concerted effort to think about death as it may affect you
• Honestly search your own mind and heart in an effort to explore what your own death means
• And what the deaths of those nearest to you mean
• Forcing yourself to face these contemplations without letting your mind wander
• Exploring your strengths and weaknesses
• Sources of internal and external support
• Particularly the role your religious/faith/spiritual beliefs and philosophy of life would play when challenged by death.

Rodolph Toch MD
Harvard Medical School
Personal Death Awareness Exercises

1. Free Association
2. Time Line (Estimating Life Span)
3. Tombstone
4. Obituary and Guided Reflection
5. Choosing your Death
6. Fear of Dying and Death
7. Dying Death and Faith
8. Dying in Pieces
Death dying and Faith

“Intensely religious people accept death more easily than most others......If they are authentic and have internalized their faith. The significant variable is not what you believe, but how truly and genuinely you believe. Truly religious people with a deep abiding relationship with God have found it much easier to face death with equanimity.”- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

What role would your religious faith or spirituality play in your dying?

What do you believe will happen to you the instant after you die?

What religious resource would you find helpful as you face death? (explain)

Can you think of a person of faith you would want with you as you die? What about that person would cause you to request his/ her presence?
OBITUARY

“Because death is a very personal matter, let me suggest that you try to design your own death—a death that would be suitable and appropriate for you, or as Avery Weisman says: A death you can Live with.” You have a style of life which you call your own. What would be your style of death? To help you in designing a death which might be appropriate for yourself, take a few minutes to compose your own obituary.” (Worden, Personal Death Awareness, p. 18)

______________________________________________ died today at the age of______

(your full name)

A native of __________________________________________, She / he died__________

(Your birthplace)

________________________________________________________________________

(cause and circumstance of your death)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

She / He is best remembered for______________________________________________

(how you hope to be remembered)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

She/He is survived by _____________________________________________________

(who in your family-present or future-will out live you—you may include family of origin-family by marriage real or projected)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Details of the funeral and burial are as follows : _________________________________

(Describe the kind of funeral you want)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Reflecting on your obituary

What was it like composing your own obituary?

Did any of the questions make you think about things you have refused or neglected to think about before?

How did you see yourself dying? Was it a so-called ‘natural’ death, a terminal illness or a quick, violent death such as an accident or homicide?

Some people find how they want to be remembered as particularly hard question, perhaps because of modestly, low self esteem, unrealized dreams, goals and desires, etc. Do you see a correlation between how you hope to be remembered and your current lifestyle?

Listing survivors can also be difficult. It’s fairly easy for most people to conceive of living longer than their parents and not living as long as their children, but when it comes to surviving brothers and sisters that is a much harder matter. If you are married or plan to be, so you anticipate outliving your spouse?

Did you choose a large or small funeral or any at all? Where was the service? Were you buried or cremated?

What, if anything, did you discover about yourself as a result of this exercise?
Eyes- seeing
Nose- Smelling
Larynx- speaking and singing
Continence- Bowel and bladder
Feet & Legs- walking and running
Hands & Arms- touching and lifting
Brain/ cognition- perception, thinking
Genitals- sexual expression
Taste
Ears- Hearing
Breaking free from fear

Which do you fear most?
____ I fear death itself more than dying
____ I fear dying more than death
____ I fear neither
____ I fear both
____ I dislike thinking about either

Is fear or being afraid against your religion?

If you are in touch with your fears associated with death and dying, what are they? Rank the following in the order of fearfulness to you, with 1 being your greatest fear and 10 or 11 being least fearful.

____ a. the pain
____ b. Progressive deterioration and disability
____ c. loosing control over personal decisions
____ d. No longer existing
____ e. being left alone
____ f. Overwhelming emotional feelings
____ g. going to hell
____ h. not knowing what is going to happen
____ i. being buried before I am dead
____ j. getting inadequate medical care
____ k. other (Specify)