

PSYC 3590 Grief and Bereavement Interview Paper Instructions

Purpose: This assignment involves interviewing someone about their experience of grief and loss and writing an analysis of the experience while applying concepts from the course. The main goal of this project is for you to analyze and critique your own communication style. The purpose is to reflect on your ability to demonstrate empathy and remain attuned to a person who is sharing difficult feelings.

Instructions: Read Chapter 10 pages 99-102 to review guidelines for empathic communication with people who are grieving. Carefully review the handout on *Listening Skills for People Experiencing Loss* posted on the course website under "Content." Reflect on which of these ineffective responses you commonly use (we all use them!) and which of the effective responses you would benefit from practicing during this interview.

Ask a friend, coworker, fellow student, partner, or family member if they would be willing to spend 15-20 minutes talking with you about a major loss that they have experienced. It can be a death or a symbolic loss (e.g., divorce, break up, natural disaster that resulted in extensive loss, diagnosis with a chronic illness, emigration to another country, etc.). Explain that you will keep their name and identity anonymous. Emphasize that the goal of the assignment is to practice and evaluate your communication skills in listening to people who are grieving. You are not analyzing their grief; you are evaluating your own listening skills.

You may tape the experience if the person you are interviewing is comfortable with this. If you do not tape the discussion, you will need to take notes and/or write down all that you can remember about the interaction as soon as you are finished. It is particularly important for you to keep track of what *you* said and try to record this as exactly (word for word) as you can.

Begin by using open ended questions to ask the person about what happened and the details of their experience. As you listen, try to make empathic statements and use open-ended questions to understand their feelings and reactions to the loss. Listen for their own unique experience and perspective, including the impact of the loss and what it meant for them.

When you are finished with the interview, ask the person how they think you did with your communication and listening skills. Explain that you will not be graded on how well you did but on how willing you are to honestly evaluate your strengths and weaknesses so you can grow and improve. Ask them to give you honest feedback about what you did well and ways you could have done better or changed your wording.

The paper should contain the following sections. Please **label each one with a heading** so I can be sure that you covered each one.

1. **Details and impact of the person's loss.** What happened, when, and where? How did the person feel at the time and how are they feeling now? What has the impact of the person's loss been? What has the grieving process been like for them?

2. **Your communication skills.** What did you say and ask? How effective were each of your responses? For this section, refer to the handout on *Listening Skills for People Experiencing Loss* posted on the course website under "Content." Be sure to label each effective and ineffective listening skill, using the labels from the handout. You will not be evaluated on how effective your skills are. You will be evaluated on how well you are able to label each effective and ineffective response. I expect that you may use some ineffective skills. We all do. Also note the strengths and weaknesses of your nonverbal behavior.
3. **Common mistakes and feelings.** How did you feel when you were listening to the person's experience? Be as honest as possible. Did you find yourself switching the focus to yourself, giving advice, trying to cheer the person up, lightening the mood with humor, or trying to fill silence because you felt uncomfortable and did not know what to say or do? If so, explain and give specific examples. If you did not make these mistakes, describe examples of times when you were tempted to do these things and how you kept yourself from doing them. How did you manage your uncomfortable feelings?
4. **Evaluation of your communication style and listening skills.** This section should include the specific feedback you got from the person you interviewed, along with your own reflections on your strengths and weaknesses as a listener. Be sure to discuss what feelings and beliefs might have gotten in the way of your being more effective and address how you can improve.

Your paper should be minimum of three (3) pages and not more than 5 pages in 12 point font. Submit it by the due date in the Assignment portal on D2L. No late papers will be accepted. All assignment due dates are listed on the Calendar on the D2L course website.

Grading Rubric

Section	Excellent 23-25 points	Good 16-22 points	Poor 0-15 points	Points
Details and impact of the person's loss 25 points	Detailed description including what happened, the impact of the loss, and the person's experience with grieving then and now.	Experience was described but missing some details.	Experience was not clear and not detailed.	
Your communication skills 25 points	Specific, word for word examples of what you said are listed. Examples are correctly labeled with ineffective and effective listening skills from the course handout.	Examples of what you said have some good details. Most listening skills are correctly labeled, using terms from the course handout.	Word for word examples are not given or are very brief and not reflective of a 15-20 minute interaction. Examples from the course handout are not given or are labeled incorrectly.	

Common mistakes and feelings	Shown insight and vulnerability in identifying uncomfortable feelings experienced during the interview. Described specific mistakes made or how you were able to avoid these mistakes despite your feelings.	Shown some limited ability to identify and describe uncomfortable feelings experienced during the interview. Gave some general examples of mistakes made or were tempted to make during the interview with limited insight into how this happened.	Did not adequately identify your own uncomfortable feelings during the interview and/or minimized the complexity of the assignment. Unable to identify mistakes made or were tempted to make.	
25 points				
Evaluation of Listening Skills	Gave specific information about feedback provided by the person you interviewed. Showed insight into both strengths and weakness of your communication style and listening skills. Identified feelings or beliefs that may have gotten in the way. Identified specific areas for improvement.	Gave limited information about feedback provided by the person interviewed. Showed limited insight into your strengths and weaknesses and feelings or beliefs that may have gotten in the way. Discussed general ideas for improvement.	No real details or thought evidenced in your discussion in this section.	
25 points				
TOTAL				