GOOD GRIEF! Defining & Working With Grief

with Andrea Torres & Dr. Seth Meyers

00:00:00 **Dr. Seth**

When your life feels out of control or you feel a little lost, think to yourself this; how can I nurture myself, and who in my life can help nurture me? Which of your friends do you find more comforting and soothing to be around?

00:00:17 **Dr. Seth**

When you're grieving, you need to be more careful and strategic about who you spend your time with because social support is what is so important when you're dealing with grief .

00:00:34 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:35 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:35 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:56 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:01:01 **Student**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:01:09 **Teacher**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:12 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:01:13 **Student**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and cover letter.

00:01:17 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:23 **Student**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:27 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:37 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:41 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:44 **Christina**

Hi, welcome back. This is Christina Barsi, one of the co-hosts on the Magic Mountie Podcast. And today, we have a really special episode because we have a guest host. We have Andrea Torres with us. She is the professor, counselor, and mindfulness guide at Mt. SAC, and she will be interviewing Dr. Seth Meyers, the licensed clinical psychologist at Mt. SAC.

00:02:10 **Christina**

And I will turn it over to Andrea to let you know what the discussion will be about. So, take it away, Andrea.

00:02:17 **Andrea**

Thank you so much, Christina. We are so grateful for being here. Thank you for having us. Second, I think it's important to talk about grief. It's something that we are collectively feeling right now, whether it is the loss of a loved one, the loss of our safety, the loss of a job, the loss of identity as a student or a co-worker, and really the loss of our connection with our support systems. We're feeling different types of grief, the world is changing.

00:02:53 **Andrea**

And although much of this is temporary, we may feel otherwise really due to the circumstances that we are in. So, we wanted to talk today about grief and ways to cope with what we all may be feeling.

00:03:10 **Andrea**

So, Seth, thank you so much. I'm so excited to have this conversation and just really to share this space with you. Can you tell us a little bit about what grief is?

00:03:21 **Dr. Seth**

Yes. Well, so grief is basically an emotional reaction to a loss. It is an emotional reaction to losing something that you were attached to. So, you can grieve all different types of things.

00:03:40 **Dr. Seth**

You could grieve the loss of someone in your life, the death of someone could bring on grief. The death of a romantic relationship, the end of a romantic relationship could bring on grief. The loss of a job, the loss of a friend, the loss of your community, the loss of normalcy in your daily routine.

00:04:07 **Andrea**

Right, and I think that makes so much sense because for a lot of us, that's what we've lost; our sense of normalcy, especially our community, by not being able to go to school, go to work, see our co-workers, our fellow classmates, our professors. So, that makes a lot of sense that that's what we're feeling right now.

00:04:31 **Andrea**

Is grief the same as sadness?

00:04:35 **Dr. Seth**

Well, that's a really good question. Grief and sadness are similar. It's sort of like they live in the same family, but they are different.

00:04:43 **Dr. Seth**

Sadness is a feeling. Sadness is an emotion that can come and go. Where grief - grief is like a set of feelings. Grief is like a set of anger and sadness and disappointment all wrapped in one.

00:05:02 **Andrea**

Okay, that makes sense. And so, I think that I can definitely identify with those feelings. I noticed that I've been feeling some anger around just all of the changes, and that's really a new feeling, I feel like for me. And I realized the other day and really just as I was getting ready for this podcast, that it is grief that I'm feeling. It is grief for the loss of the community that I once had there at the college and really just for the life that we all had.

00:05:39 **Andrea**

And so, I've heard that there are stages and I've researched some of these stages of grief. Can you talk a little bit about the stages of grief?

00:05:49 **Dr. Seth**

Sure. So, when we talk about grief, it's widely established that there are multiple stages that a person goes through during the grieving process. These stages come from a psychiatrist who's no longer with us, but her name was Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. And she says there are five different stages a person goes through when they are grieving a major loss.

00:06:17 **Dr. Seth**

And those stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. So, just hearing those words, when you think about anything you've lost, when you think about anything you've ever grieved in your life, you too, can probably relate to having a moment where you go through denial. You just try to believe it didn't happen. You try to lock it out entirely. Maybe the next week you feel angry, you may go through a stage of depression.

00:06:54 **Dr. Seth**

The end-stage where we all want to get to when we are dealing with grief and a major loss, is we want to reach a place of acceptance. And when you have accepted, truly accepted a major loss, you're no longer strongly emotional about it. You're not angry about it, you're not even extremely sad about it. You accept it.

00:07:23 **Andrea**

Right. And I think that right now, we're going in and out of these stages. I think acceptance is a little bit more challenging in particular with what we're dealing with because of the uncertainty, because we don't know when the end is in sight, because there is so much, I think that is uncertain. And so, maybe that continues us on that loop of like angry about it and sad about it, denying that this is even really happening.

00:07:56 **Andrea**

I was talking to my students the other day and I just brought up that I was kind of like, "Is this really happening? Is this really what we're going through? Am I really teaching virtually? Are we really in this environment?" And so, I think, yeah, it's that idea of like denial, like, is this really happening?

00:08:16 **Andrea**

Even though, I think for many of us, we are surviving, we're doing it day-by-day. We are kind of in that acceptance in a lot of places. But you're right, I think it comes up in stages.

00:08:29 **Dr. Seth**

And Andrea, I think that one of the things, one of the things that we are all sort of grieving now is the loss of control, the loss of predictability. I mean, whoever saw this coming? Sometimes, you catch yourself and you think, "Am I living in the Twilight Zone? Are children really not at school? Are whole college campuses working remotely?"

00:08:58 **Dr. Seth**

It's just not something we ever saw coming. So, that is part of what makes it so difficult to wrap our brains around. We have no experience dealing with this. And so, it's really like an undercurrent of a mild trauma that we are all dealing within our lives.

00:09:19 **Andrea**

Right, right. And so, is there a time limit or a time that we can get over grief, a process of when it ends?

00:09:31 **Dr. Seth**

Well, that's a great question. And the most important thing that I want people to take away about our podcast today, and grief and what it looks like, is that there is no universal playbook on what grief looks like. Two people will never grieve in exactly the same way. There is no set amount of time, how long it takes to get over something.

00:09:57 **Dr. Seth**

For example, the loss of a job that you loved may take a certain amount of time. The loss of a loved one may take a certain amount of time. What we're dealing with, we really have no experience. So, you just need to understand, it looks different across different people, and it will take a different length of time for people to process their grieving feelings.

00:10:20 **Dr. Seth**

Most important is we shouldn't judge ourselves for how we cope with our grief, and we shouldn't judge others with how they cope with their grief.

00:10:34 **Andrea**

Right, I think it's the idea of knowing that we are all feeling some type of sadness around it.

00:10:43 **Dr. Seth**

That's right.

00:10:43 **Andrea**

Some type of loss - regardless of what the loss is, we are all feeling that. And I think that that's a way that we can connect. It's a way that we can let ourselves feel it and connect. And I think that's also one of the messages that we want to get across today as well, is that it's okay to feel what you're feeling. It's okay to feel sad. It's okay to reach out and tell somebody else, "Hey, last night I was crying. I was overwhelmed with emotion and it just kind of came out."

00:11:19 **Andrea**

So, speaking about reaching out, what are some of the best ways to deal and to cope with the grief that we might be feeling?

00:11:29 **Dr. Seth**

So, there are sort of two different things I think you have to keep in mind when you're grieving. One is, think about it on a body level and two, think about it on an emotional level.

00:11:43 **Dr. Seth**

So, on the body level, you want to focus on things that soothe your body, that soothe your central nervous system. You want to take walks, you want to take warm baths. You want to sleep well, go to bed a little earlier, tuck yourself in to bed just a few minutes earlier. You want to eat well. You need to remember your body is healing too with whatever loss you're feeling.

00:12:16 **Dr. Seth**

On the emotional level, like you said earlier, Andrea, you want to connect. That is the number one goal for everyone to remember. When you're grieving, when you're dealing with loss, increase your connections, reach out more, call your parent more, talk to friends about your feelings more, write in a journal - and it doesn't need to be a leather-bound journal. It doesn't need to be perfect.

00:12:45 **Dr. Seth**

But it's connect, get some of those feelings out. You cannot keep sad, angry, disappointed feelings locked inside your body, because if so, it will just delay your healing process.

00:13:01 **Andrea**

Right, that makes so much sense. I know that for myself, one of the things that has been affected is my sleeping. And so, I'm really looking at this time as a way to take better care of myself in my sleep patterns, because I'm noticing that that really is being affected. And I know that grief and those feelings of sadness or uncertainty or anxiety are effected with how I sleep. So, I definitely feel that body portion of it.

00:13:35 **Andrea**

And also that emotional piece, I think the connecting, like you said, is so important. My students, a lot of them have journaling that they do in their class and it's so great. I mean, the journals that I've been reading, the amount of emotion, the amount of sadness or fear that they're expressing with everything that they're going through.

00:13:55 **Andrea**

Although it's very hard to read all of that, one after another, I'm grateful that they're putting it out on paper, that they are getting it out of their bodies. I think, like you said, it's so important to move that energy. So yeah, with the walking, moving those emotions, with the journaling, getting it out of our body, expressing it.

00:14:17 **Andrea**

And sometimes, if we don't have that person to talk to you in the moment, that's what's great about the journal. Is that if you don't have that friend or that parent or somebody to speak within the moment, get out that piece of paper and just write it out.

00:14:33 **Dr. Seth**

That's right. And you know, another word that I want people to think about is the word "nurturing." You know, when you're dealing with loss, when you feel out of sorts in your own life, when your life feels out of control, or you feel a little lost - think to yourself this; how can I nurture myself, and who in my life can help nurture me? So, think to yourself, which of your friends do you find more comforting and soothing to be around.

00:15:09 **Dr. Seth**

When you're grieving, you need to be more careful and strategic about who you spend your time with because social support is what is so important when you're dealing with grief. The more social support you have, the more nurturing you have, the better you will feel, the more you'll be able to make sense of your loss.

00:15:34 **Andrea**

Right, and I think that one of the great things that our college is doing is just really continuing to have those spaces available for all of us. So, even though we might feel that we have lost it in the physical form, it's still available to all of us through virtual things as this.

00:15:56 **Andrea**

There are so many different programs on campus that are offering the spaces to connect. For example, the Mountie Mentor Program just had a workshop recently, and their title was, "We're in this together." In REACH is having something called "Take Care Tuesdays." And they're saying that they're staying connected weekly.

00:16:19 **Andrea**

Things like our weekly wellness resources through the wellness center, they're having virtual yoga, sound bath, cooking classes. And those are all places where we can arrive together in the space and just share still in our community.

00:16:39 **Andrea**

Student Health Services, we have a lot of options available through different things like getting therapy and mindfulness sessions.

00:16:48 **Andrea**

Talking about therapy, when a person is experiencing grief, do they need actual psychotherapy or grief counseling, or is there other things that they can pursue to overcome their feelings?

00:17:03 **Dr. Seth**

Well, when you're dealing with grief, when you're dealing with a major loss, counseling, and therapy is always one of the best ways to help yourself heal. Again, because it's social support. It's someone being there to listen to you, to help guide you, to reassure you, to soothe you.

00:17:25 **Dr. Seth**

So, therapy is always a good option. And in Student Health Services, we are doing sessions, video sessions for therapy. We are doing phone sessions. So, therapy is always one positive way.

00:17:38 **Dr. Seth**

But the truth is, it could be another relationship where you reach out to that person, you make yourself vulnerable, you ask for help, you share what you're going through, what you're thinking, how you're feeling - and that act of knowing someone cares, someone's looking out for you, that is the common denominator.

00:18:01 **Dr. Seth**

So, that could be your coach on a sports team at Mt. SAC. That could be your pastor. There are lots of channels where you can reach out to someone. And it doesn't have to be a therapist, but what does have to happen is you do have to let someone know how you're feeling.

00:18:23 **Andrea**

Right, and I think, again, I know that with grief, it's important to name how we're feeling, to name that it's grief. I think the message here is to be able to acknowledge and accept that it is grief that we're feeling, that it is loss. And again, whether it is the loss of a loved one, that can be a very deep grief or the loss of a community and just our day to day routine. The routine being lost, being able to go to some of our favorite places, things like that.

00:19:02 **Andrea**

So just again, acknowledging, naming that I'm having a hard time, or I feel sad, just saying that.

00:19:13 **Dr. Seth**

That's right, and telling yourself this; if I do have days when I feel lonely or confused or angry, or disappointed - this pandemic has taken an emotional toll on every single one of us. So, if we have days where we're not feeling so good, we need to remind ourselves this; this is a normal reaction to a very abnormal situation.

00:19:43 **Andrea**

I like that, definitely. So, we are supposed to be feeling fearful and anxious and uncertain.

00:19:53 **Dr. Seth**

That's exactly right. And you know, Andrea, how that is so counterintuitive. We normally feel like if we feel sad or lonely or disconnected and maybe a little hopeless, my gosh, when are things ever going to go back to normal? Will things ever be normal again? You know, normally when we have those feelings, we beat ourselves up and we tell ourselves we shouldn't have those feelings.

00:20:17 **Dr. Seth**

Something would be wrong with you if you woke up happy, you went to bed happy, you felt happy all day long in the midst of this pandemic. We are resilient, human beings are resilient. So, we will get through this. We keep putting one foot in front of the other. Our students, they may not like doing classes online, but they're doing it. We keep going, but there is a loss that we're all dealing with.

00:20:48 **Andrea**

Right, yeah. I was telling my students the other day, the fact that we're all here, that we're still willing to show up, even though we don't know the technology or we're frustrated because we're needing to learn how to do new things - but we'll keep showing up.

00:21:07 **Andrea**

And you made a really good point about that nurturing piece. I also think about the mantra of being gentle with ourselves, having patience. I think you talked about patience before, and having patience with ourselves during this time. And also just knowing that we do grieve differently.

00:21:31 **Dr. Seth**

Right, and I think that one of the things that we need to remind ourselves is that although this pandemic has made everyone grieve, lots of different things ... I mean, let's be honest, some people have lost loved ones due to COVID. Some people have lost jobs, incomes. The stress in people's families maybe has been at an all-time high.

00:21:57 **Dr. Seth**

But we need to remember that all of though this has been really challenging for us, something good can always come from something bad. And that is our job to say, "Is there any lesson that we can learn from this?"

00:22:15 **Dr. Seth**

One of the things is families, friends, are spending more time together talking, connecting than they did in the past. So, that is a benefit.

00:22:27 **Dr. Seth**

So, ask yourself, what lessons can you take from this? What changes will you make when things get back to more normal- ish? What are some of the things that might be good that can come out of this? Do you have any thought in your own life, for example, anything, any lesson you've learned?

00:22:47 **Andrea**

Right, yeah. I was reading an article recently and David Kessler, who is also somebody who worked with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and the stages of grief. He spoke with her before she passed and wanted to add on a sixth stage, which is called "meaning." And I think that that's what you're speaking about, is what is the meaning behind everything that's occurring? What lessons are we learning and how in those moments of darkness or fear, where's the light, and what is it that we are learning?

00:23:25 **Andrea**

I know for myself personally, I definitely am learning a higher level of self-care, more integrated connection to my body, and really thinking about what matters, what matters in our lives, and what connections matter in our lives.

00:23:46 **Dr. Seth**

And Andrea, too, also, maybe what's missing in our lives. What feels like it might be missing in my life, has this pandemic, this loneliness, this sense of feeling lost - has it exposed to me, maybe I need to add a friend or two to my life? Or maybe I never exercised before, but maybe I've learned from this that I need to start exercising. Maybe if I didn't cook before or ever follow recipes, maybe I need to start cooking more.

00:24:23 **Dr. Seth**

You know, things like that may sound silly, but the truth is cooking is a nurturing activity. You nurture yourself with that food, you nurture the people that you cook for. So, there are always lessons to learn and it's continuing to expand our daily activities to say, "What's missing? What do I need to add to my life to feel more nurtured, to feel more fulfilled, to feel more connected?"

00:24:54 **Andrea**

Right. I had a participant this last week in one of my mindfulness sessions. And after the session, she was brought to emotions as many people often are after one of the sessions. And she just shared that this was the first time in her day and her week that she really just had that stillness, and that ability to tell herself that even if she slows down with her goals or with school, that it's going to be okay. But in this time, she might need to focus a little more on her health and just again, what is meaningful.

00:25:36 **Dr. Seth**

So important Andrea. That sixth stage you're talking about, finding the meaning, that's the deeper question each of us should ask ourselves as we grieve with this pandemic; how can I bring more meaning to my life? How can I improve my life? How can I increase my connections to this world?

00:25:57 **Andrea**

Right, beautiful. So, Seth, because we do work together in Student Health Services and we're very proud and happy and grateful of the hard work that we've been doing as a team, do you want to share a little bit more about the resources that we are providing through Student Health Services, particularly?

00:26:18 **Dr. Seth**

Sure, so through Student Health Services, if you want to set up a session, you can have a session by video if you'd like. You can have a session by phone. We are here to support you. This is included in the student activity fee, and we want our students to take advantage of these services. We know that when people get counseling, they feel more connected, they feel less isolated. And so, this is a service that you are entitled to.

00:26:52 **Dr. Seth**

I also just want to remind students to reach out to your academic counselors too. You know, the vast majority of staff at Mt. SAC are working remotely. So, you may not see them in person, but they are working and they are there to take your phone call, to answer your email. So, the more you reach out, the more you connect, the better you'll feel the less this pandemic will bring you down.

00:27:22 **Andrea**

Right, and as a counselor and in that role, I definitely know that us counselors are there, we're there to meet with our students virtually or over the phone and to connect with students in many different ways.

00:27:36 **Andrea**

One of the other things I just wanted to mention also that a lot of the things that we have on the Student Health Services web page, for example, prerecorded workshops that you can watch at your own time and also the fall education events that we have going on. Those are open to not only students, but faculty and staff as well.

00:27:58 **Andrea**

And so, we really want to make sure that everyone knows that there are services and resources available to our entire community, and to just reach out. I'm sure that the resources will be placed under the notes here for this podcast. But to reach out to us and we can help guide and direct anybody to the services that you might feel are right for you.

00:28:24 **Andrea**

Well, Seth, I think that for myself, really just connecting virtually weekly with our team and just any time that we have these spaces has really helped me also with my feelings of grief as well. So, I appreciate it. I appreciate this space of the podcast and the stuff that I'm learning through here as well. And that we're still able to get all of this information out to our community. So, thank you for this time that we've shared together. Anything that you would like to also share?

00:28:59 **Dr. Seth**

I just want to say thank you for what you do. You know, what you do in teaching meditation and mindfulness - 15, 20 years ago, almost nobody meditated in the United States. But thanks to people like you, it's actually becoming a much more common activity. And it's one of the activities that can make people feel more relaxed, less stressed out, and more in control over their own thoughts and their own feelings. So, I'm grateful to what you do.

00:29:30 **Dr. Seth**

I love our community, Mt. SAC, our team of therapists at the health center, even our medical staff, our nurses, our physicians, our nurse practitioners. Students just need to remember, our community is still here.

00:29:44 **Andrea**

Right, thank you so much.

00:29:47 **Dr. Seth**

Thank you.

00:29:50 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts, so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen.

00:30:04 **Christina**

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