WORKSHEET 55 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Far from those who stayed behind

Living with ambiguous loss: present in your heart, absent from daily life

AIM

Help the person recognise the “ambiguous loss” that comes with distance (loved ones who are alive but absent from daily life, parents growing old far away) and find ways of keeping the bond while tolerating the absence.

WHO IT IS FOR

Expatriates and migrants far from their family, elderly or ill parents in the country of origin, guilt about leaving.

DURATION

20 min in session

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Introduce the notion of ambiguous loss: someone is physically absent but very present psychologically, with no clear end and no ritual.
2. Explore the associated emotions: homesickness, guilt, worry, helplessness (missed events, a parent’s illness).
3. Distinguish what depends on the person (form and rhythm of contact, visits, role from a distance) from what doesn’t.
4. Build concrete ways of keeping the bond (call rituals, letters, shared projects, taking part from a distance).
5. Work on accepting what still hurts (worksheets 19 and 22).

POINTS TO WATCH

> Guilt is common: validate it without reinforcing it. If a loved one falls ill or is at the end of their life back home, support difficult decisions (whether or not to go back) without making them for the person.

REFERENCES

Boss, P. (1999). Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief. Harvard University Press.

Bhugra, D. & Becker, M. A. (2005). Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity. World Psychiatry, 4(1), 18-24.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 55 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

Far from those who stayed behind

Your loved ones are alive, but far away. You miss birthdays, meals, sometimes difficult moments. It is a particular kind of loss, called “ambiguous loss”: they are present and absent at the same time.

1. Who do I miss, and at what moments?
2. What I feel (homesickness, guilt, worry): _____
3. What depends on me to keep the bond (calls, visits, rituals, shared projects).
4. What doesn’t depend on me and that I can try to accept.

Person	What I miss	How I keep the bond	What I could add

How can I be there for them, in my own way, from here?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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