

Recovering From Loss

Triton Tools and Tidbits • Season 5, Episode 1 • Running Time: 14:15 minutes

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

students, loss, series, pandemic, week, sessions, ucsd, lawson, talk, grief, join, facilitating, attend, marshall, katie, experience, anna, resources, community, focused

SPEAKERS

Katie Van Kirk, Mary Anderson, Anna Bowens

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Mary Anderson 00:02

Welcome to Triton Tools and Tidbits. I'm your host Mary Anderson. Today's episode focuses on mental health practices. How to stay healthy this spring as we still face the challenges of the pandemic, specifically loss. During the last year much of our community has experienced loss, whether its loss of jobs, loss of income, loss of health, loss of significant events and social events, and most importantly, loss of loved ones.

Mary Anderson 00:28

In this episode, we'll discuss a community series designed to help the UC San Diego community navigate loss due to the COVID pandemic. Joining me today is Marshall College student Katie Van Kirk and Student Affairs Case Manager Anna Bowens. They join me to talk about this special series and how it can help our community of students move forward. Welcome, Katie and Anna, thank you for joining me today. I'm hoping you both will share information about the Lawson COVID series. Specifically - how it started, who can join, how to join, what participants can expect. Will you start by telling us what the Lawson COVID Community series is about and how it got started?

Anna Bowens 01:06

Yes, absolutely. And first, thank you so much for having me, for having Katie, I'm really excited to share a little bit about this project that I've been working on. How the Lawson COVID Community series initially started was actually just in a conversation with the Dean of Marshall College, Amber Vlasnik. We were just in our weekly conversations about students - and how we can best support students. Amber brought up - kind of an obvious trends that we've been seeing - which is that, of course, students are really struggling. And loss looks really different to everyone. We're sort of talking about the short-term and long-term implications of the COVID pandemic, and how students are processing loss - and really thinking about what more can we be doing to really support students in their long-term reconciliation with loss during this time; understanding that it really looks very different for everyone. I have some background in grief support and grief counseling, so I got to work thinking about how can we both support students and help expose them to the number of incredible resources and people on campus who can support them in different ways. I started thinking about different weeks and different

themes, and created this six-week series, where every week there's a different theme. It all comes back to developing coping skills around loss, and really building resilience. My goal was - bringing me in as the core facilitator - my goal was to bring in different people from across campus who specialize in different areas to talk about different ways that students might be experiencing loss and grief and anxiety, and giving them the tools to succeed by bringing in different people with different expertise on campus.

Mary Anderson 03:16

Wow, that sounds really great. So, are you continuing the series?

Anna Bowens 03:20

I am- yes. So, what I didn't mention - we ran the series in its continuing six-week format last quarter. It was really only for Marshall students, and it we used it as our test theories - to see if students came, how the participants felt, if the sessions really resonated with students, and in deciding if we needed to reconfigure for spring quarter - we will be running it again in spring quarter. This is now going to be open to all UCSD students, not just Marshall students.

Mary Anderson 04:00

Okay. Can you talk a little bit about what topics will be covered in the series?

Anna Bowens 04:06

Yes. So, as I said, every week is a different theme. The first week is just an overall intro to concepts of loss and COVID, and we do a few exercises. And I also just really want to preface everything by saying - loss is a really personal topic. One thing that's really important that I feel like students need to know is that there's no expectations for students to disclose what loss they've experienced. My goal with this series is really education and participation. All of the all these sessions are meant to be interactive, but they're not meant to be interactive in a way where students are forced to share something that they don't feel comfortable sharing. That is certainly not a prerequisite. We don't begin the sessions by going around and saying, "Please share your name and please share what you've lost." It really is about building resilience and looking forward. I think that that's just important. Then we have a week focused on navigating academics and talking about focus challenges during the pandemic, which I think has impacted every single student. We're going to have someone from Academic Advising coming to co-facilitate and talk a little bit about that. We have one dedicated week that is really all about grief and COVID. So, folks who have lost someone - either during the COVID pandemic, due to COVID, or during the COVID pandemic in some other way. We're really talking about the grief journey. And I think for a lot of people - even who have lost folks before the COVID pandemic - this time of isolation is bringing up a lot of new feelings of grief. Then we have a week that is co-facilitated by Renee Dell'Acqua from health promotions, who's incredible - and is facilitating a great presentation on cultivating resilience in challenging times, which is a really powerful question. Then we have Alexia Cervantes from UCSD Rec facilitating a session on releasing loss in the body. Really paying attention to how trauma and stress is held in the body and how we release that stress. We do some really cool breathing exercises and somatic therapy techniques. It's very, very cool. And then another week, we'll talk about community impact and COVID. It's a little bit of everything.

Mary Anderson 06:53

All right, well, that sounds really great. Thank you. Hi, Katie. How are you doing this morning?

Katie Van Kirk 06:59

Good. Thank you so much for having me on this podcast. I'm really excited.

Mary Anderson 07:04

Yeah, we're happy you could join us today. And it's my understanding that you participated in the Marshall Lawson COVID series. Is that correct?

Katie Van Kirk 07:13

Yes.

Mary Anderson 07:14

All right. Can you tell us a little bit about your involvement and why you decided to participate?

Katie Van Kirk 07:21

Sure. So, I am just an avid fan of the series - Anna has invited some of the best people at UCSD to share their knowledge and resources offered to students that otherwise might be hard to find on our own. I just basically joined every session. That's kind of my involvement.

Mary Anderson 07:46

Okay, great. And why was it that you to attend first place?

Katie Van Kirk 07:55

It was kind of by coincidence - I found I found the flyer for the last and COVID series through one of the many, many emails that students receive. And it was kind of out of curiosity. I looked at the flyer - and the part where loss was explicitly defined as not pertaining to the loss of death really caught my attention. It made me curious. "Okay, what is loss. I want to find out - I might be grieving loss of something that I lost through the pandemic that wasn't dead." So, the flier implied that loss can mean many things to different people. And I - like so many others - have experienced some kind of loss in many factors of my life related to the pandemic. So, I decided to join this series, and it ended up being something that I looked forward to every week.

Mary Anderson 08:57

Great. Well, thank you. Can you talk to us a little bit about how you found it to be helpful?

Katie Van Kirk 09:04

I found it to be helpful in many aspects. Some sessions focused on wellbeing, others focused on resources available at UCSD. And not only did I learn about wellbeing skills that I found critical during the pandemic, but I also learned about unique resources that I otherwise would not have known about, had I not attended the Lawson COVID series. It definitely helped me validate the loss that I was experiencing, and also gain coping skills to deal with my grief.

Mary Anderson 09:41

Okay, well, thank you. I think you bring up a really important point - that loss means something different for everybody, and it doesn't necessarily mean loss of a loved one. That's definitely something we want to hit home today - that students don't have to have lost a person to have experienced loss during this pandemic. Katie, can you tell us - would you recommend this loss and COVID series to other students at UC San Diego?

Katie Van Kirk 09:47

Absolutely 100%. My experience with the series has been nothing but helpful and enriching. It's different content every week, so I'm always looking forward to learning something new. Anna is very welcoming. And the guests that she brings are amazing with the material that they share, but they're also amazing people. In my experience with the series - I would attend it, I'm able to connect with the guests, I feel welcomed by Anna, and it's become a community - a place where I feel safe to share my experience and learn valuable skills. So, I highly, highly recommend it.

Mary Anderson 10:51

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining us today Katie. I'm going to ask Anna another question. I know you said there were six sessions in the series - do students have to attend to all of the sessions participate?

Anna Bowens 11:04

Absolutely not. It's not a sort of therapy group setting where you're expected to attend every single week. It really is there for students to take from it whatever they feel like might be useful. They can see that maybe they want to attend the grief session, and then also the academic session, and none of the other topics really sound like they might resonate with them. So, you can attend one... six. You can really use it however is suits you best.

Mary Anderson 11:38

And it's open to all students at UC San Diego, correct?

Anna Bowens 11:41

Exactly. Yes. All students - absolutely all students at UCSD.

Mary Anderson 11:45

Okay. If a student would like to attend, how can they find information on how to attend, and how they get involved?

Anna Bowens 11:53

It should be posted on the Virtual Student Union shortly. I am requiring registrations. If a student can't find it on the Virtual Student Union, they can always just email me directly. My email address is abowens@ucsd.edu.

Mary Anderson 12:19

Okay, great. Thank you. I know that we all hope that students struggling with loss will consider getting involved with this series. I know everybody's been managing a lot of stress right now, and this seems like a very helpful way to help with managing that stress and loss in a variety of areas. Again, I just

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want to thank you both for joining me today to share your experiences and your knowledge about the loss and COVID series. In addition to the loss and COVID series, I want to encourage students to continue taking advantage of other resources on campus, such as the Counseling and Psychological Services otherwise known as CAPS. Students who'd like to connect with a counselor can always call them at 858-534-3755. One other resource I'd like to mention that's new to UC San Diego - the entire community has access to an app called Headspace that focuses on meditation and mindfulness. All students are able to go to the CAPS website and find information about how to sign up for a free account. Meditation is both a skill and an experience that can positively impact our students' overall health and happiness - so I hope all students will take advantage of that as well. Thank you both, Katie and Anna, for joining me today with this episode of Triton Tools, Tidbit. Your information was very helpful, and I hope you have a successful series this spring quarter.

Anna Bowens 13:42

Thank you so much. I'm really excited. Thank you so much for having us on and for highlighting this series that I hope will be a supportive space for students.

Mary Anderson 13:52

All right. Thanks everyone, and we will see you next time on Triton Tools and Tidbits.