Children & Grief: 
A Journey of Healing

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THE CENTER FOR:

Healing
Opportunity
Perseverance
Enlightenment

Grief In Children

- “Five (5%) percent of children in the United States experience the death of a parent by the time they reach the age of 16”
  — Shephard, Ori, Mahon & Carroll, 2002

- “One (bereaved) child in five is likely to develop a psychiatric disorder ... the highest rates of reported difficulties are found in boys.”
  — C. Lloyd Life Events and Depressive Disorder Reviewed” Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry October, 2000
Grief In Children

- “The death of a parent is the most serious and life influencing loss a child can face.”
  - David W. Howard “An Exploratory Study of Attachment and Coping for Bereaved Elementary Children.” December 2000

- “Patients growing up in families where one or both of the parents died appear more compromised in their interpersonal relationships... that is, these patients are more likely to have impairment in achieving stable, mature adult attachments regardless of their diagnosis.”

Helping Bereaved Children

“The most instinctive place bereaved children and teens turn when in crisis is to their peers who have experienced similar losses. Peer support groups help counter the sense of isolation many bereaved children feel in our mourning-avoidant culture.”

- Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. Author, Healing the Bereaved Child Director for the Center for Loss and Life Transition, Fort Collins, Colorado

REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES

- Ongoing follow-up with families after the death of a child for 15 months
- Outreach, letters and articles to these families for 15 months after the death.
- Acknowledgment of the child’s birthday and death anniversary through a card sent to these families
PROGRAMS

- 8 week close-ended groups for parents who have lost a child
- 8 week group for parents who have experienced a perinatal loss, stillbirth or early infant loss.
- Hospital wide memorial service once every two years

PROGRAMS

- Developmentally age appropriate groups for children ages four -- teens
- Groups for parents/caretakers held at the same time
- Meets once every other week throughout the year

GROUPS

- Groups are open-ended and ongoing
- Groups facilitated by clinical social workers and volunteers
- Families stay in program for 1 to 2 years
GROUPS

- Pre-school group (Red) – ages 4-5
- Younger group (Green) – ages 6-7
- Elementary group (Yellow) – ages 8-9
- Middle group (Blue) – ages 10-13
- Teen group (Orange) – ages 14-18
- Parent/Caregiver group

ASSESSMENTS

- Individual assessment for children and families prior to starting the program
- Assessments are completed after 6 months and again at one year for families

CHILDREN & GRIEF
What is Grief?

- Grief is the process of learning to live without
- Grief is the process of learning to live with emptiness
- Grief is a way of keeping connected to the one we have lost

Five Stages of Grief

I. Denial
II. Anger
III. Bargaining
IV. Depression
V. Acceptance

Four Tasks of Grief

1. Acknowledge the reality of the loss
2. Process the pain of grief
3. Adjust to a world without the deceased
4. Find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one’s journey through life
First Task of Grief

Acknowledge the Reality of the Loss

- Transition from a physical relationship to a relationship with the memories
- "Death is the end of a life, not the end of a relationship" ~ Tuesdays With Morrie

Second Task of Grief

Process the Pain of Grief

Manifestations of Grief:

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Behavioral
- Spiritual
- Emotional

Experiencing the Emotions of Grief

Emotions of Grief:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Guilty
- Vulnerability
- Helplessness
Third Task of Grief

Adjust to a World Without the Deceased

- External Adjustments environment
- Internal Adjustments
- Spiritual Adjustments

Fourth Task of Grief

Find a way to Remember the Deceased while Embarking on the rest of one’s Journey through Life

- Continuing to live fully in the present
- Reinvesting in life and other relationships
- Actively responding rather than passively responding to grief
- Looking for meaning beyond the loss

Developmental Understanding of Grief

- Infant to 2 years
- 3-5 years old
- 6-8 years old
- 9-12 years old
- Teens – 13 and older
Characteristics of Children’s Grief

- Children grieve in spurts
- Children generalize from the specific to the more general
- Children are physical in their grief
- Children grieve as part of the family

Responses of the Grieving Child

Responses of the Grieving Child

**Academic**

- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Failing or declining grades
- Increased absences or reluctance to go to school
- Forgetfulness, inattentiveness; daydreaming
- Overachievement, trying to be perfect

Responses of the Grieving Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noisy, fussy, disruptive behaviors</td>
<td>Concern about being treated differently from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive behaviors, frequent fighting</td>
<td>Fear, guilt, anger, rage, regret, sadness, confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-compliance to requests</td>
<td>Insecurity, issues of abandonment, safety concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in risk-taking or unsafe behaviors</td>
<td>“I don’t care” attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactive-like behavior</td>
<td>Depression, hopelessness, intense sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation or withdrawn</td>
<td>Shy, sensitive, frequently tearful, irritable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regressive behaviors to a time when things felt more safe and in control</td>
<td>Appears unaffected by the death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High need for attention</td>
<td>Preoccupation with the death, wanting details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A need for checking in on the surviving parent</td>
<td>Recurring thoughts of death or suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses of the Grieving Child

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomachaches, headaches, heartaches</td>
<td>Withdrawal from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent accidents or injuries</td>
<td>Withdrawal from activities or sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased requests to visit the nurse</td>
<td>Use of drugs or alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nightmares, sleeping difficulties</td>
<td>Changes in relationships with teachers and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite or increased eating</td>
<td>Changes in family roles (e.g., taking on the role of the deceased parent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low energy, weakness</td>
<td>Sexual acting out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hives, rashes, itching</td>
<td>Shoplifting, stealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea, upset stomach</td>
<td>Difficulty with being in a group or crowd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid heart beat</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Responses of the Grieving Child

Spiritual

- Anger at God
- Questions of “why me” or “why now”
- Questions about the meaning of life
- Questions about the afterlife
- Doubting or questioning previous beliefs

Intuitive vs. Instrumental Grievers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Respond to internal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to external cues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express intense feelings and emotions</td>
<td>Cry less and attempt to gain mastery over their feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary adaptive strategy is to “go with the feeling” and reach out to others and talk</td>
<td>Primary adaptive strategy is directed activity, problem-solving</td>
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Dr. Ken Doka & Dr. Terry Martin
**Grief vs. Trauma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Grief</th>
<th>Trauma</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Guilt          | • “I wish I would have”  
• “I wish I would not have”  
• “It was my fault”  
• “I could have prevented it”  
• “It should have been me” |                                                                       |
| Dreams         | • Dreams are about the person who died  
• Dreams are about the child himself/herself dying or getting hurt |                                                                       |
| Generalized Reaction | • Sadness  
• Sadness | • Terror  
• Terror and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and fear for safety |
| Pain           | • Related to loss | • Related to loss  
• Related to tremendous terror and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and fear for safety |

William Steele, The National Institute For Trauma And Loss In Children

**Interventions for Grieving Children**

1. Help children to understand

2. Help children to feel the feelings

3. Help children to remember and share their memories

**Helping Children Understand**

C  Consider the specific child

H  Honesty with the child

I  Involve the child

L  Let the child talk

D  Do it over again
Four Challenges in the Grieving Process

1. Understanding the reality of the loss
2. Experiencing the emotions
3. Integrating the loss
4. Searching for meaning

ACTIVITIES

Challenge I: Understanding the Reality of the Loss

- Meet The Press (with interview Sheets)
- This Is Me
- Feelings Heart
- M&M Game
- Starburst Game
- Soccer Ball with Questions
- Grief Twister

ACTIVITIES

Challenge II: Experiencing the Emotions

- Feelings Pizza
- Feelings Sentence Starters
- Feelings Magnets
- Pushing Buttons
- Feelings Inside vs. Outside
- Oceans of Emotions
- Worry Clouds
- Worry Bears
- Volcano In Your Tummy
ACTIVITIES

Challenge III: Integrating the Loss

- Coping with the Holidays (Feelings Turkey, Treasure Chest)
- Tree of Feelings and Thoughts
- Broken Hearts
- Collages to Represent Who I Was Then & Who I Am Now
- Rocks of Grief/Rocks of Strength
- Power Shield
- Circle of Support

ACTIVITIES

Challenge IV: Searching for Meaning

- Memory Pillow
- Memory Quilt
- Journal (Letters to Their Loved Ones)
- Balloons With A Message
- Message In A Bottle
- Goodbye Notes
- Memory Books
- Memory Game
- Memory Sentence Starters
- Tree of Memories
- Butterfly Messages
- Memory Shield
- Rays of Hope