

Free seminar:

Children and Grief



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With Lionel Hartley, PhD

Children grieve, yet they grieve differently to adults.

Their grief is rarely supported and not usually recognised because it is often demonstrated as disruptive behaviour, depression, anger, fear, guilt, poor attention span and confusion. Consequently we often misunderstand or misinterpret their behaviour or misbehaviour.

In this seminar we learn the differences between the way children and adults grieve, and develop some **practical tools** for supporting children through times of grief and loss.



Programme:

- How separation or loss affects different ages of children
- The five stages of the grief process as specifically applied to children
- Helping a grieving child.
- Grieving the loss of a child
- Questions and answer session.



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Children and Grief
Lionel Hartley – Completely revised - 2015

Slide 1: Title Slide

Slide 2: Who is your seminar author?

Schoolgirl Belinda Stotler found her elder sister dead on her bedroom floor when she went in to change her bandages from a recent surgery. A blood clot from that surgery is what killed her. About six months after her sister's sudden death, Belinda wrote a poem to tell of her journey through grief - from the initial disbelief to the final acceptance, although she still says that there is not a day that goes by that she doesn't miss her best friend.

One morning I found you in eternal sleep;
I tried to wake you as I began to weep,
But all my pleas you could not hear;
Oh if I could have only kept you near,
Away from the voices of those who went before,
Who beckoned you to come to that distant shore.

I find it so very hard to believe
That you have gone and I must grieve;
I call out your name – you answer not,
And I look for you in every familiar spot.
Everything seems so strange and surreal,
I ask everyday is it a dream or real?

Where are the soft brown eyes of affection?
Where is the laughter and talk of childhood reflection?
Where is the loving care when I was sick or sad?
Where is the generous soul for which I was glad?

Where is the forgiving and understanding heart?
Where are the bonds that were there from the start?

I miss all the little ways you showed you cared,
For there were so many good moments we shared;
Looking back on my life's assorted scenes,
I realized you taught me what love truly means;
You were my trusted confidante and best friend,
On whose loving support I could always depend.

I look at your smiling face in all my photos;
Memories flood my mind as I touch the mementos
From the happy times you and I have had,
But now these bring tears and make me sad;
For the time together went by in a wink,
Life was not as long as we'd like to think.

Sometimes memories bring comfort and make me smile,
But there are times when grief takes over for a while.
Can it be true what they say of 'time healing grief'?
Is it enough when they say death has given you relief?
I should be happy you're free of pain and sorrow,
And rejoice that you'll always have tomorrow.

Now I look down at your name on a cold hard stone
That says little of the loving light you have shone;
It tells nothing of the wonderful person you were,
And only serves to remind me of the painful loss I
endure;
But I know your kind soul wants no tears or pain,
Instead you'd want warm memories and love to remain.

Although I cry and stand grief-stricken by your grave,

I promise not to forget the loving memories you gave;
But still I miss you so very much my sister dear,
And your caring words I once again long to hear;
My heart's only solace is one day I will see you as
before,
Beckoning me to come join you on that white distant
shore.

Welcome to today's seminar.

Children grieve, yet they grieve differently to adults.
Their grief is rarely supported and not usually recognised
because it is often demonstrated as disruptive behaviour,
depression, anger, fear, guilt, poor attention span and
confusion. Consequently, we often misunderstand or
misinterpret their behaviour or misbehaviour.

In this seminar we learn the differences between the way
children and adults grieve and develop some practical
tools for supporting children through times of grief and
loss. I will share some practical tools to help us to cope if
we are grieving the loss of a child.

Slide 3: Context

Let's put this into a context.

Nearly five percent of children under the age of 15 will
experience the loss of a loved one in their lives.

In areas prone to wars, pestilence & natural disasters, this
increases dramatically.

Approximately 80% of children demonstrate the
resilience needed to adjust to the loss in a healthy way.
However, 15-20% continue to demonstrate significant
emotional and/or behavioural concerns 2 years after the
loss

Slide 4: Grief – some definitions

Grief is the subjective feelings that are brought about by any significant loss.

We often associate grief with death, but in reality grief may be associated with any loss: divorce or relationship break-up; loss of health; retirement; graduation; loss of financial security; either you or a child leaving home (for college, marriage); loss of a friendship; sexual abuse; a miscarriage; loss of a cherished dream; losing money (including bad investments); loss of mobility/capability; a hysterectomy; the birth of a handicapped child; being robbed or mugged; loss of faith or religious belief; a loved one's serious illness; an abortion; loss of virginity; loss of a pet; losing a job or leaving a familiar work environment (even a hated one) can bring on grief. For convenience, I will narrow today's discussion to the loss associated with death.

Slide 5- Stages of Grief

At our recent "Practical Help for the Grieving Seminar, I covered this in some depth, but for those who missed it or would like a summary in relation to children, here are some of the stages that children go through when they are grieving.

Firstly, denial, numbness, and shock when we exclaim, "Oh, No!" "This did not happen. She is not dead; she just went away." "I can't believe it."

Then follows a stage of bargaining when Junior reasons, "I promise I'll be good if she will come back." "If only I had not been naughty, she wouldn't have left me. If I try real hard for Mum and Dad, I'm sure that Grandma will return."

Maybe a stage of depression: “I really miss her; I feel alone now.” “How will I get along without her?”

Sometimes anger: “Why did this have to happen? I hate her! She left me!” “How could she do this to me?”

And finally, acceptance: “Grandma is gone but it is ok.” “I’ll meet Grandma in heaven someday.”

Slide 6: Myths about Children and Grief

There are a number of myths regarding children’s grieving that I would like to draw to your attention. Rather than challenge these now, I’m sure that by the end of today’s presentation you will see how erroneous these myths are.

There is the myth that children don’t grieve. There is the false assumption that children don’t hurt as much because they understand less. There is the mistaken belief that children experience few losses, and that grief follows a predictable and orderly stage-like progression. One of the most harmful myths is the perception that the goal in helping bereaved children is to “get them over” grief and mourning.

Slide 7: More myths

Here are a few more myths that I hope our seminar today will dispel: There is the false idea that the grief and mourning of adults surrounding bereaved children doesn't have any impact on them. We may foolishly worry that speaking of the deceased will reopen a child’s grief wounds. We may believe in the erroneous distraction theory that it’s best to keep grieving children

busy with lots of activities. And we may deprive them of appropriate commemoration with the misguided belief that children are better off if they don't attend funerals.

Slide 8: Factors Affecting a Child's Grief

Many factors can affect the grief response of the child, including:

The type of death and the circumstances of the loss

The physical and emotional functioning of the adults around them

The child's gender and age and their level of emotional development

The child's personality and temperament and their physical and mental health

Pre-existing risk factors including previous experience with death and their perception of religious and ethnic customs

Family relationships, especially the relationship with the person that died or those involved with the loss

Quality of relationship with deceased and the status of any "unfinished business"

Their life stressors, the child's personal resilience and their ability to cope with the stress

And the amount and availability of support bearing in mind the demographics.

Slide 9: The Loss...

The loss may be of a parent, sibling, grandparent, close friend, or other family member. It may be a loss of any of many things that I mentioned earlier such as losses through divorce and separation, the loss of a pet, loss of sexual innocence, or a loss of security.

The loss may have occurred suddenly or with knowledge ahead of time, however, even children who are “prepared” for the loss are still overcome by the intensity of actual grief and loss.

Loss impacts every individual differently but it always makes some kind of impact.

This results in a number of common outcomes...

Slide 10: Outcomes of Loss

These are a heightened risk for psychological and emotional problems, difficulties concentrating and performing in school, the experience of increased feelings of fear and sadness that is usually associated with a decreased self-esteem resulting in a loss of connection with the child’s social network.

Now before I look at some general ways that we can help any child with grieving, let’s look at the different ages and see how they respond to grief as demonstrated by their beliefs and behaviour and how we can help at each stage.

Slide 11: Ages 0-2

Babies and toddlers have no real comprehension of death, however they are perceptive to changes in the family’s emotions.

Their demonstrated behaviours include crying, indigestion sucking, biting and sleeplessness.

The primary ways we can help the child at this age is through physical contact developing routines, attending to their physical needs and allowing them to mourn

appropriately (I'll talk about this later) and above all, patience.

Slide 12: Ages 2-6

The infant child may believe that death is temporary or reversible as the correlation between death and finality may not be developed yet.

They will usually grieve through play, imagination and magical thinking.

They yearn for details and specifics and may ask *what* rather than *why*.

They may experience a cycle of sadness to playtime to sadness to playtime, etc. A bereaved child may ask about the death one minute, then play happily the next. We must realize that periods of play do not mean the child has come to terms with the loss, but are expressions of that loss or respites from their feelings.

And the infant child will associate death with punishment.

This is revealed in certain behaviours that are regressive in nature – for example, bedwetting. They may be loaded with questions or they may be withdrawing. They may demonstrate a morbid interest in dead things. Sometimes they will behave as if nothing ever happened – death? – what death? They may have disturbed sleep and Nightmares and you may find them acting out the loss and crying.

We can help them to identify feelings through story-telling, puppets, art, music, clay, sand-table, role-playing, drama, picture journals and memory books.

Now before I share any more on how to help, because the further principles apply also to the next age bracket, I'd like us to look at ages six to nine years.

Slide 13: Ages 6-9

Firstly the beliefs: Around this age, children grasp the concept of the finality of death and to understand that death is irreversible yet may optimistically believe that not everyone dies. They will also ask, am I responsible; am I to blame? They may be frightened of the concept of death and yet they are still curious. They will still believe that death equals punishment. Around this time they may ponder on what life will be like without the loved one. Their behaviours may still be regressive. They will demonstrate a curiosity and interest in death. They may insist that you leave them alone. This is quite normal for this stage. They may have difficulty with concentration and their school grades may suffer and they may be acting out at school. They may become very protective, in fact, overly protective. They may have a curious, even morbid interest in dead things and they may suffer with nightmares and sleep problems.

Slide 14: Ages 2-9 – how to help (See also Slide 42)

So, how to help children up to age nine: Firstly accept that a certain amount of regression is normal, and although frustrating for us, it is okay. They will benefit from some physical contact, especially a warm hand and a tight hug. Some one-on-one time playing outdoor games such as throwing a Frisbee, hooping a basketball, bopping a swing-ball, swinging a cricket bat, kicking a football etc. can help.

Answer their questions truthfully and simply with a focus on more how, where, what and why. Reassure that death is not “contagious”. Reassure them that if they want or need to cry, then that’s okay.

Willingly give them your open mouth with honest answers and your open ears with patience.

Slide 15: Ages 9-12

Pre-teens and early-teens usually have more mature concept of death and may want to know why and how it happened. They may feel both guilt and responsibility. They have both an awareness of the death along with a denial that it ever happened. They rationalise that it will never happen to them – Who, me? Never! And they begin to ponder the future without the loved one, wondering, “how will my high-school graduation or wedding day be now?”

Between the ages of nine and twelve patterns of grief have ups and down movements like a roller coaster at a theme park. Expect a small amount of regression and moodiness, sometimes even no expression of grief or interest whatsoever. Their behaviours centre around the physical aspects of death and they may still argue in their mind or with others that it still never really happened. Like those in the six-to-nine-year bracket, there may be possible academic and concentration declines, nightmares and acting out at home or school.

Slide 16: How to Help

Yes, all that regression is still okay.

Because their moods can swing we need to be considerate of any expectations that we place upon them.

They may need some encouragement to openly express any hidden feelings. It would be helpful to explore your religious beliefs and explain these to your child.

Never discourage nor underestimate the importance of peer support.

Make yourself available for communication with your child and remember that physical contact is still important.

We also need to allow them to grieve in the way that is unique to them, giving them their own mourning-process choices.

Slide 17: Teens

Teens associate death with finality and so they are able to internalise their grief. They become more aware of life and of death.

Regression, if present, is now is occasional. Like their non-grieving peers, teens are moody and will often hide their feelings.

There will be issues of control, rebellion, withdrawal and physically acting out.

Sleep disturbances, changes in eating habits and academic declines are common.

Teens may also demonstrate some role-confusion and engage in impulsive, risky behaviour. As they sort out friends from acquaintances, there will be peer group changes.

Slide 18: Teens - How to Help (See also Slide 46)

Tell them about your own grief journey. Disclose to them your own hurts and fears. Disclosure is not the same as

seeking their support. Be supportive to them and encourage other supporting adult relationships and peer support groups.

Monitor any high-risk behaviour and be open to communication with them – most of all, be available for your teens.

While offering support do not neglect physical contact if appropriate. Encourage the expression of their feelings and encourage honesty.

Help them to accept and to cope with mood swings and the frightening regressive behaviour.

I'll have a lot more practical helps to share shortly, but before we do...

Slide 19: Tasks of Mourning for Children

In her book *Talking with Children About Loss*, Maria Trozzi outlines four major tasks of mourning for children that correlate to a certain degree to the stages of children's grieving that we have already mentioned. There is the task of understanding – and you will have noticed that this differs for each of the different age brackets. Then there is the actual grieving process and the twin tasks of commemorating and of moving forward. Let me just speak to these last two for a moment.

Slide 20: Task of Commemorating

The task of commemorating can be accomplished by involving the child in formal commemorative services, spending specific time endeavouring to grasp the child's understanding of a formal commemorative service. Then there are informal commemorative services such as may

be held in your own home maybe even with only you and the child or siblings or peers.

There are various rituals that you can undertake to assist the child with this task, such as working on a memory picture-book or memory treasure-box together, planting a tree or visiting the graveside together some time after the funeral to reflect and pray.

You may recall one of the myths that I mentioned earlier was the misguided belief that children are better off if they don't attend funerals. We can also fulfil the task of commemoration through Funerals, wakes and memorial services.

Slide 21: Attending the Funeral

Involve the child in any decision about attending the funeral, body viewing or memorial service. Seek to understand the child's intentions regarding attending or not attending.

Prepare child for what will happen, what they will see, and how people will behave at the funeral or memorial service, providing specific information and discussing their attendance and how they might feel. Don't be afraid to dialogue with them about death. Allow them to participate in their own way and discuss in advance any adult expectations.

Slide 22: Not Attending the Funeral

If the child chooses not to attend, continue to support them in the expression of their mourning. Consider some other options such as letting go a helium-filled balloon outdoors, planting a tree, making a collage or picture montage, involving the children as helpers before and

after the funeral. Do not use funeral non-attendance as an excuse not to talk to children about the death.

Slide 23: Task of Moving Forward

Assist the child with moving forward. Help them to understand that we never “get over” a significant loss. David Kessler wrote, “If children are old enough to love, they are old enough to grieve. Many times in our society children are the forgotten grievers. For instance, when a parent dies, whom do we expect to help the child with their grief? The surviving parent. That parent not only has their own grief to deal with but they are learning for the first time how to be a single parent. They, like their child, can use support in their grieving.”

Slide 24: Helping a Grieving Child

Here follows are a further twenty-one practical ways to help a child advance through their grieving.

Overlay Slide 24 – 1. Listen.

Listen to them. Children may want to share their story. This is a healing experience. Do not give advice or make judgments. Reflect back what the child says, using the child's words. Children must feel that their physical and emotional needs are going to be met before he or she can give into grieving.

Overlay Slide 24 – 2. Don't force the child to talk.

Don't force the child to talk. They will talk when they are ready.

Overlay Slide 24 – 3. Listen some more.

Listen some more. Sometimes children don't want to talk, can't find the words, or try to protect adults around them from more pain, so they choose to be silent. In this case, when you listen, do it by paying attention to the non-verbals.

Overlay Slide 24 – 4. Be honest with the child.

It is important to be honest. It is difficult to talk to kids about painful things because we want to protect them, so be honest with the child. This helps to develop trust and fosters further communication.

Overlay Slide 24 – 5. Answer their questions

It is important for children to know that they can ask questions, so answer their questions, even the hard ones. Answer their questions truthfully, being sensitive to their age. If you don't know an answer, it is perfectly acceptable to say, "I don't know."

Overlay Slide 24 – 6. Give the child choices

Give the child some choices. This helps them regain the control that they feel they may have lost.

Overlay Slide 24 – 7. Encourage consistency and routine

Encourage consistency and routine, especially mealtimes and bedtimes.

Slide 25: Helping a Grieving Child 8. Talk about and remember...

Talk about and remember the person who died. Bringing up the name of the person who died gives children permission to share their feelings about the person. It

shows them it is not taboo to talk about the deceased. Sharing a memory shows the child that the person who died will continue to live on within them and impact the lives of those left behind.

Overlay Slide 25 – 9. Expect and allow all kinds of emotions...

Expect and allow all kinds of emotions, both positive emotions and negative ones. Allow for expression of feelings but not in a way that hurts others, property or the child. You can say, “I can see how angry you are about this although it is not okay to hit out. It is okay to talk about it, though. Will you tell me how you feel with words or draw me a picture?” Teach your child how to change their physical response. For example, deep breathing, imagery, muscle relaxation.

Overlay Slide 25 – 10. Respect differences in grieving styles.

Respect differences in grieving styles. Each child’s grief experience is unique.

Overlay Slide 25 – 11. Provide hands-on activities.

Provide hands-on activities, which includes drawing, journaling, painting, modelling clay, collages, and memory-boxes. Note, this is not a diversion tactic, but rather as a tool for healing.

Overlay Slide 25 – 12. Exercise and physical play...

Exercise and physical play helps children release energy and emotion.

Overlay Slide 25 – 13. Be a model for your children

Be a model for your children. Children watch adults to get cues about how to grieve. It is important for children to know it is okay to cry, okay to be angry, and it is okay to grieve.

Slide 26: Helping a Grieving Child 14. Hug with permission.

Hug with permission. Let your child be the first to let go.

Overlay Slide 26 – 15. Practice patience.

Practice patience.

Overlay Slide 26 – 16. Respect grieving children...

Show respect to grieving children even when they are in a bad mood. Dare I suggest that we should be showing them respect whether they are grieving or not.

Overlay Slide 26 – 17.

Be aware, some kids will regress, others will become little adults – both extremes, including those in between, are normal.

Overlay Slide 25 – 18. Eat right and drink water.

Encourage your child (and remind yourself) to eat healthfully and drink sufficient water.

Slide 27 Helping a Grieving Child 19. Help the child at bedtime.

Help the child at bedtime. Establish consistent bedtime rituals such as a story, a song, or a prayer. Finish with a hug and/or kiss. Use a night-light if the child has nightmares. Saying, “I’ll see you in the morning,” may reassure them that they won’t lose you too.

Overlay Slide 27 – 20. Take a break.

Take a break. When possible, plan fun activities for your children that will allow them to laugh, play, and be kids.

Overlay Slide 27 – 21. Play is critical and helps to process grief.

Encourage them to play and have fun, as play is critical and helps children to process grief.

Slide 28: Discussion Question

“What are some of the ways we can help children re-establish communication with parents or other significant adults?”

Overlay Slide 28 – stop timer

Slide 29: Grieving the Loss of a Child

In this section I am going to look at a number of issues, including how parents cope with the death of a child, especially when the natural grieving process is interrupted, what health effects does the death of a child have on the parents, and finally I will look at some practical coping strategies.

Overlay Slide 29 - Quotation

“Children are not supposed to die... Parents expect to see their children grow and mature. Ultimately, parents

expect to die and leave their children behind... This is the natural course of life events, the life cycle continuing as it should. The loss of a child is the loss of innocence, the death of the most vulnerable and dependent. The death of a child signifies the loss of the future, of hopes and dreams, of new strength, and of perfection.”

Slide 30: The Grieving Process

The grieving process for adults differs from that of children and I will briefly summarise this for you here. The initial emotion that one feels is a feeling of shock and total astonishment.

We go through a process of denial when we cannot believe what has happened so we go on thinking that nothing has happened.

Then a reaction of anger comes from feelings of unfairness, abandonment, or feeling powerless attached with the loss.

You feel guilt when you feel that you have violated your own standard or perhaps you feel that you have let others down in some way.

When one begins to feel overwhelmed by what has happened and change seems hopeless, this is usually when the depression sets in.

Acceptance, for most people is the final stage of the grieving process. We come to terms with the loss, and are ready to move on with our lives.

However, empowerment is a step beyond acceptance. Not all people get to this stage. Your loss is integrated as part of your identity. It cultivates within you a newfound hunger for life; it drives you forward. People who truly achieve empowerment usually have a belief in an after-

life with a hope in a final resurrection and meeting their loved-one again.

Slide 31: Health Effects of Death

How is a parent's health affected after the death of a child?

Please be aware that there are a number of psychological effects following the death of a child and these include depression, difficulty with social functioning, issues with our overall psychological well-being, negatively reacting to good events and harbouring worries and concerns regarding the future.

Physical effects of the death may include dramatic weight loss or gain, a change in eating or sleeping habits, feeling irritable or listless and possible hair loss or greying.

Slide 32: Family Life Cycle

Allow me to digress just for a moment. Monica McGoldrick and Betty Carter in their book, *The Expanded Family Life Cycle*, have proposed the following family lifecycle:

Leaving home: single young adults

The joining of families through marriage: the new couple

Families with young children

Families with adolescents

Launching children and moving on

Families in later life

Slide 33: Family Life Cycle (with rectangular box)

When a child dies, there is a break in the cycle, with the parents not being able to complete the last three or

sometimes four stages for that child as planned (families with adolescents, launching children and moving on, and families in later life)

So what is lost?

Slide 34: What is lost?

In a study done by Dr Linda Edelstein, there are three major types of loss for a parent, especially the mother: There is the loss of a loved child as an aspect of one's self, the loss of future hopes and expectations and the confrontation with false illusions as a result of the death.

Slide 35: Practical Helps

What are the possible solutions to this dilemma?

Firstly we need to recognise that parents must get through, not over, their grief. Grief is not a fence that we climb over hoping the other side is greener; it is a winding tunnel that we enter, with all its associated darkness, gloom and uncertainty and our grief work is to journey forward until we see a glimmer of light at the other end; and then bravely move onward into the sunshine of a very different landscape. Admit to yourself and others that your grief is overwhelming, unpredictable, painful, draining, and exhausting, and that the situation should not be ignored.

Many find solace in their religion, which helps them in accepting the reality of the loss.

Many can find comfort in rituals, through funerals or memorial services. Keep a diary or journal of your journey through the tunnel of grief.

Talk about the loss and encourage others to talk of the child, thereby acknowledging and sharing the grief. Oh

how wonderful to walk through the dark tunnel when you have someone to hold your hand.

We can be supported by finding comfort in friends and family; counting on, confiding in, and trusting those who care.

And by helping ourselves through self-expression – maybe writing a poem, drawing a picture, making a scrapbook. Allow yourself to experience the pain of grief and work through it.

We can help ourselves by caring for ourselves – adequate rest, moderate exercise, healthy food, a small amount of sunshine, a generous amount of fresh air, drinking sufficient water, keeping ourselves clean, and by trusting in a Power greater than ourselves. We can help ourselves by accepting that we are allowed to feel pleasure and continue our lives.

And lastly we can help ourselves by reaching out and helping someone else.

Slide 36: Question time

Slide 37: Next Program

Slide 38: Program repeated Monday 7:30pm

Slide 39: Blank Slide

Slide 40: The difference between grief and depression

Slide 41: Gender differences

Slide 42: The needs of the 2-5 year-olds (Refers back to slide 14)

Slide 44: The needs of the 5-9 year-olds

Slide 46: The needs of the teenager (Refers back to slide 18)

Slide 47: What to do/what not to do

Slide 51: Blank Slide



Welcome




Children and Grief


With Lionel Hartley, PhD

How children grieve
Helping a grieving child
Grieving the loss of a child



www.lrhartley.com/grief




1



Who is your seminar author?





Lionel Hartley, author, radio broadcaster, public speaker and retired sociologist. He was a Lifestyle Educator and Family-life Counsellor for over three decades. He is a grandparent, married to Rosemary with three grown children.


Lionel D C Hartley, DipAdmin(NZIM), HonDip (DramArt), DipTheol (SDB), RGN (Psy,PsyPaed, Admin,Nutn), BA (Lit), MA, PhD [etc.]
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We welcome your participation in today's seminar. Time may be allowed at the end for your questions.


Poem by Belinda Stotler



2




Context




3

Nearly five percent of children under the age of 15 will experience the loss of a loved one in their lives.


—Currier, J. M., Holland, J. M., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2007). The effectiveness of bereavement interventions with children: A meta-analytic review of controlled outcome research. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 36(2), 253-259.



3



Grief: Some Definitions



4

- **Grief** - the subjective feelings that are brought about by a significant loss
- **Mourning** - the process by which grief is resolved; the societal expression of grief
- **Bereavement** - mourning being deprived of something /someone (bereft)

4



Stages of Grief




5




- Denial, numbness, and shock
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Anger
- Acceptance


5



Myths about Children and Grief




6




- Children don't grieve
- Children don't hurt as much because they understand less.
- Children experience few losses
- Grief follows a predictable and orderly stage-like progression.
- The goal in helping bereaved children is to "get them over" grief and mourning.

6



More myths



7

- **The grief and mourning of adults surrounding bereaved children doesn't have any impact on them.**
- **Speaking of the deceased will reopen a child's grief wounds.**
- **It's best to keep grieving children busy with lots of activities.**
- **Children are better off if they don't attend funerals.**

7



Factors Affecting a Child's Grief



8

- **Type of death**
- **Physical/Emotional functioning of adults**
- **Gender and age**
- **Personality and temperament**
- **Pre-existing risk factors**
- **Family relationships**
- **Quality of relationship with deceased**
- **Life stressors**
- **Support**



8




The Loss...



9

- **May be of a parent, sibling, grandparent, close friend, or other family member.**
- **May have occurred suddenly or with knowledge ahead of time**
- **Impacts every individual differently but always makes some kind of impact.**



9



Outcomes of Loss



10

- **Heightened risk for psychological problems**
- **Difficulties concentrating and performing in school**
- **Increased feelings of fear and sadness**
- **Decreased self-esteem**
- **Loss of connection with social network**

- Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2007

10




Ages 0-2



11

Beliefs

- **No comprehension of death**
- **Changes in family emotions**

Behaviours

- **Crying**
- **Indigestion**
- **Sucking, Biting**
- **Sleeplessness**

How to Help

- **Physical Contact**
- **Routines**
- **Physical Needs**
- **Child's Mourning**
- **Patience!**



11




Ages 2-6



12

Beliefs

- **Death and finality**
- **Reversible? Temporary?**
- **Magical Thinking**
- **Details, specifics please!**
- **Sadness to Playtime to Sadness (to playtime)**
- **Death = punishment**

Behaviors

- **Regressive in nature**
- **Questions**
- **Withdrawing**
- **Interested in dead things**
- **Death? What death?**
- **Nightmares**
- **Acting out / Crying**

12




Ages 6-9



13

Beliefs

- **Finality of death**
- **Everyone doesn't die**
- **Am I *responsible*?**
- **Frightened.. Yet-Curious..**
- **Death.. *Still equals punishment***
- **Ponders life without loved one**

Behaviors

- ***Still Regressive***
- **Curiosity – interest in death**
- **Leave me alone!**
- **Concentration, grades, acting out at school**
- **Overly Protective..**
- **Interested in dead things**
- **Nightmares / Sleep problems**

13




Ages 2-9



14

How to Help

- **Regression? Okay...**
- **A warm hand, a tight hug..**
- **It's time to grab the basketball!**
- **Keep it truthful, Keep it simple**
- **More how, where, what and why**
- **Needing to cry? That's okay!**
- **Open mouth, open ears!**




14




Ages 9-12



15

Beliefs

- **Guilt and Responsibility**
- **Awareness along with Denial**
- **Who? Me? Never!**
- **How will my graduation or wedding day be now?**

Behaviors

- **Grief rollercoaster**
- **Regression**
- **Moodiness / No Expression**
- **Physical Aspects of death**
- **“It still never happened..”**
- **Possible academic / concentration declines**
- **Nightmares**
- **Acting Out at home/school**



15




Ages 9-12



16

How to Help

- **Yes, all that regression is *still* okay.**
- **Moods can swing! Expectations.**
- **Hidden Feelings/ Expression Encouragement**
- **Importance of Peer Support**
- **Availability for Communication with Children**
- **Physical Contact**
- **Giving children their *own* mourning-process choices**

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Teens

Beliefs

- **Death and finality**
- **Internalized Grief**
- **Awareness of death**

Behaviors

- **Regression is occasional**
- **Moody/hides feelings**
- **Control Issues**
- **Rebellion /Withdrawal**

- **Physically acting out**
- **Sleep Disturbances**
- **Academic Declines**
- **Sleeping/Eating Habits**
- **Role Confusion**
- **Impulsive, Risky Behavior**
- **Peer group changes**

17

17



Teens


How to Help

- **Self disclosure**
- **Supporting adult relationships**
- **Peer Support Groups**
- **Monitoring high-risk behavior**
- **Communication Availability for teens**
- **Offering support/ Physical Contact**
- **Encouraging Expression/ Honesty!**
- **Mood Swings/ Regression**




18

18


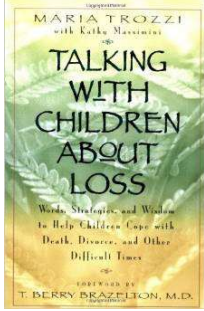


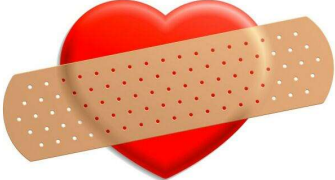
Tasks of Mourning



19

- **Task of Understanding**
- **Task of Grieving**
- **Task of Commemorating**
- **Task of Moving Forward**



(Trozzi, 1999)

19



Task of Commemorating



20

- **Formal commemorative services**
- **Children's understanding of formal commemorative services**
- **Informal commemorative services**
- **Rituals to assist children with commemoration**
- **Funerals, wakes, memorial services**



20



Attending the Funeral



21

- The Child's Intentions
- **Prepare the Child for What will Happen**
- Providing Specifics
- Attendance / Feelings
- **Dialogue about Death**
- Participating
- Adult Expectations



21



Not Attending Funeral




22


- Children not wanting to attend
- Expression / Mourning
- Other Options
- Children as Helpers
- Talking to children
about death



22



Task of Moving Forward




23

- **Assisting the child with moving forward**
- **We never “get over” a significant loss**


“If children are old enough to love, they are old enough to grieve. Many times in our society children are the forgotten grievers. For instance, when a parent dies, whom do we expect to help the child with their grief? The surviving parent. That parent not only has their own grief to deal with but they are learning for the first time how to be a single parent. They, like their child, can use support in their grieving.”

David Kessler

23





Helping a Grieving Child



24

1. Listen.
2. Don't force the child to talk.
3. Listen some more.
4. Be honest with the child.
5. Answer their questions, even the hard ones.
6. Give the child choices.
7. Encourage consistency and routine.

24

HELP! **Helping a Grieving Child** 

25

6. Give the child choices.
7. Encourage consistency and routine.

**8. Talk about and remember
the person who died.**

9. Expect and allow all kinds of emotions
10. Respect differences in grieving styles.
11. Provide hands-on activities.

12. Exercise and physical play
13. Be a model for your children.




25

HELP! **Helping a Grieving Child** 



26

12. Exercise and physical play
13. Be a model for your children.


14. Hug with permission.

15. Practice patience.
16. Respect grieving children
17. Some kids will regress;
others will become little adults.

18. Eat healthfully and drink water.





26

HELP! **Helping a Grieving Child** 

27

17. Be aware, some kids will regress, others will become little adults.
18. Eat healthfully and drink water.
19. Help the child at bedtime.
20. Take a break.
21. Play is critical and helps to process grief.



27


 **Discussion Question** 

28





“What are some of the ways we can help children re-establish communication with parents or other significant adults?”

28



Grieving the Loss of a Child




29


Children are not supposed to die... Parents expect to see their children grow and mature. Ultimately, parents expect to die and leave their children behind... This is the natural course of life events, the life cycle continuing as it should. The loss of a child is the loss of innocence, the death of the most vulnerable and dependent. The death of a child signifies the loss of the future, of hopes and dreams, of new strength, and of perfection.

— JH Arnold and PB Gemma, *A Child Dies: A Portrait of Family Grief*, 1994

29




Grieving Process (Adults)



30


1. Shock
2. Denial
3. Anger and Guilt
4. Depression
5. Acceptance
6. Empowerment




“Though united in that we are grieving, we grieve differently. As each death has its own character, so each grief over a death has its own character, its own inscape.”

- Nick Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*

30



Health Effects of Death



31

Psychological Effects

- Depression
- Difficulty with social functioning
- Overall psychological well-being
- Reactivity to good events
- Future worries and concerns

Physical Effects


- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritable or listless
- Hair loss




The sudden death of a child is so unwanted and unexpected it can cause major changes in how someone handles grief

— Eric Erickson (1902-1994)

31




The Family Lifecycle




32

Monica McGoldrick and Betty Carter have proposed the following family lifecycle:


- Leaving home: single young adults
- The joining of families through marriage: the new couple
- Families with young children
- Families with adolescents
- Launching children and moving on
- Families in later life



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The Family Lifecycle



33

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What is lost?



34

- **Three major types of loss for a parent, especially the mother:**
 - The loss of a loved child as an aspect of one's self
 - The loss of future hopes and expectations
 - The confrontation with false illusions as a result of the death

– Linda N Edelstein, *Coping With Grief*, 1981



34



Practical Helps



35

- **Parents must get through, not over, their grief**
- **Finding solace in their religion**
- **Finding comfort in rituals:**
- **Acknowledging and sharing their grief**
- **Finding comfort in friends and family**
- **Helping yourself through:**
 - self-expression
 - self care
 - helping others



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Question Time



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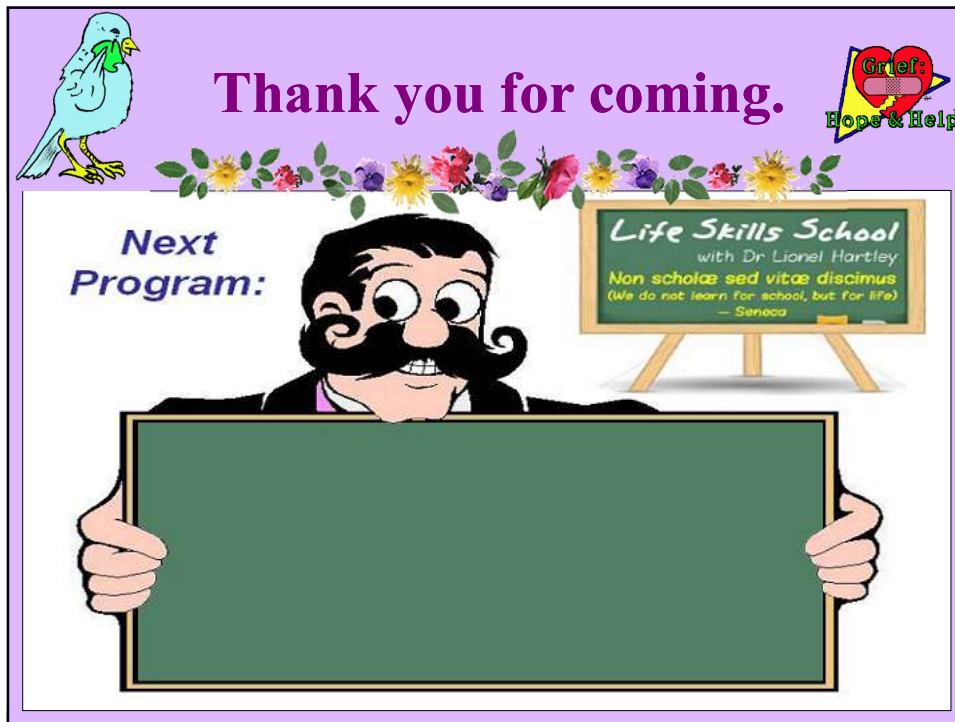


Question Time

Please fill in the survey form, Thanks.



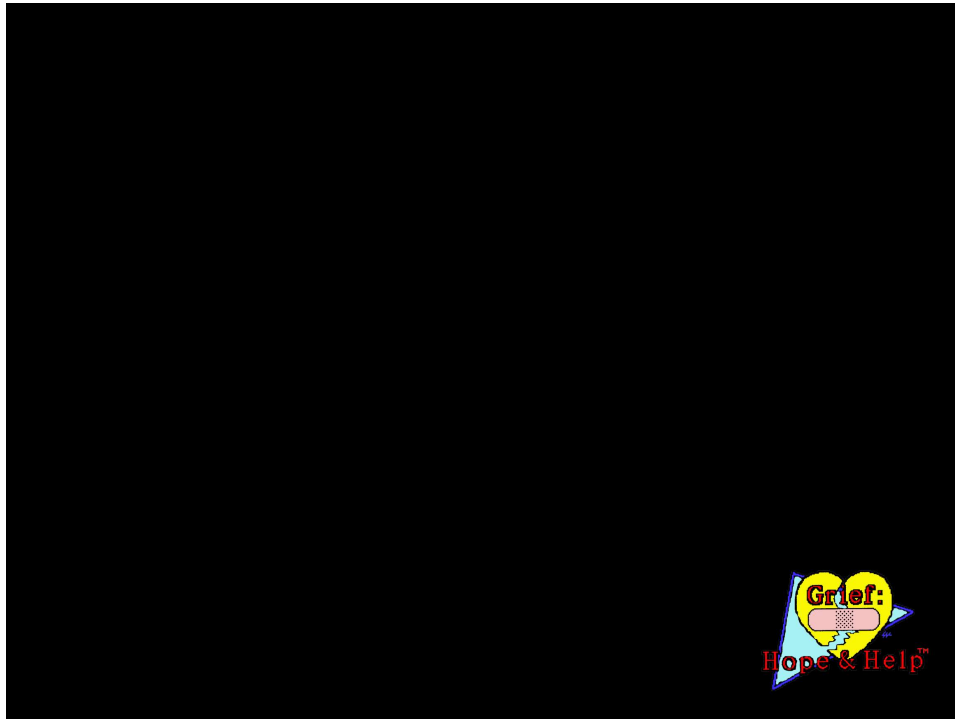
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Grief or Depression?



Grief	Depression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced in waves • Diminishes in intensity over time • Healthy self-image • Hopelessness • Response to support • Overt expression of anger • Preoccupation with deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moods and feelings are static • Consistent sense of depletion • Sense of worthlessness and disturbed self-image • Pervasive hopelessness • Unresponsive to support • Anger not as pronounced • Preoccupation with self


* Excerpts from Therese A. Rando (1993). Treatment of Complicated Mourning. Research Press, Champaign, IL.

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Gender Differences







41


Women	Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ express their feelings early after loss ➤ reach out for social support ➤ are seen to express more sorrow, depression, and guilt ➤ more willing to talk about the loss of a child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ more likely to take on a managerial role ➤ intellectualize their emotions ➤ indicate that they feel more anger, fear, and loss of control ➤ use denial more ➤ more private about grief

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Needs of the 2 – 5 year old






42


- **Kind and understanding tone of voice and demeanor**
- **Encouragement to talk about how s/he feels in whatever way s/he can express it**
- **Permission to “play about” death and the events surrounding the experience**



42




Needs of the 2 – 5 year old



43

- **Open and direct manner that says “I’m with you and you are with me. There are no secrets.”**
- **Sharing of how you feel or felt when a similar thing happened**
- **Reassurance that remaining family members will take care of the child**

43




Needs of the 5 – 9 year old




44



- **Clear answers in simple terms to the questions that they ask, no matter how improbable their fears seem**
- **An accepting listener to the memories s/he has of the deceased**
- **Explanations to refute the magical beliefs that feed their fears**
- **Acceptance of play, artwork, songs, etc. about the events surrounding the death**



44




Needs of the 5 – 9 year old



45

- **To be taken seriously, no matter how shallow his/her concerns seem**
- **To be included in family discussions about the changes brought about by the death**
- **To have his/her ways of grieving accepted**
- **While this age-group may understand death intellectually, they may have great difficulty understanding it emotionally.**

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Needs of the Teenager


46

- **To be included in planning & decision making**
- **To be informed of what to expect in terms of events, ceremonies, rituals, etc.**
- **To know what to expect from various relatives**
- **To know what is expected of them**
- **To witness adults grieving so they can learn adult ways to grieve**
- **To be encouraged to talk about what they think and feel and have their thoughts and feelings respected**

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What to Do



47

- **Act natural**
- **Show genuine care and concern**
- **Make it clear that you are there to listen**
- **Talk openly and directly about the person who died**
- **Keep in mind that evenings, weekends, anniversaries, and holidays can be extra challenging times**



47




What to Do




48

- **Find a way to help children symbolize and represent the death**
- **Pay attention to the way a child plays; this is one of the main ways that children communicate**
- **Say that you are sorry about the loss**
- **Sit next to a child that wants closeness**

48




What NOT to Do




49


- Try to shelter children from the reality of death; it can be a learning experience
- Give false or confusing messages (“Grandma is sleeping now.”)
- Tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset
- Try to cheer the person up or distract from the emotional intensity (“At least he’s no longer in pain.” “She’s in a better place now.”)



49



What NOT to Do



50

- Offer advice or quick solutions (“I know how you feel.” “Time heals all wounds.”)
- Pry into personal matters
- Ask questions about the circumstances of the death

50