

**PEDIATRIC SUICIDE: MEETING THE
UNIQUE NEEDS OF FAMILIES IN THE
AFTERMATH**

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OF FAMILIES IN THE AFTERMATH**

EMPOWERING FAMILIES, INCLUDING SIBLINGS, DURING THE LOSS OF A CHILD MAY DECREASE THE EFFECTS OF THAT LOSS ON CHILDREN, INCLUDING COMPLICATED GRIEF, DEPRESSION, AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS. IT IS A DUTY OF THE CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST TO DIRECT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO INDISPENSABLE, EMPATHETIC, AND ACCOMMODATING RESOURCES TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: 0-3 YEARS

- DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND: MEANING OF PERMANENTLY OF DEATH, CONCEPT OF TIME (PHYSICAL)
- VERY AWARE OF DIFFERENCES IN ENVIRONMENT AND "GONE-NESS" OF LOVED ONE
- OFTEN EXHIBIT PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF (SLEEP, EATING, BOWEL CHANGES)
- DIFFICULT TO SOOTHE
- TO HELP: MAINTAIN ROUTINES, CHOOSE FAMILIAR AND SUPPORTIVE CAREGIVERS, ASSIGN A SUPPORT PERSON DURING FUNERAL/RITUAL, AFFECTION, ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS BY NAMING

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: 3-5 YEARS

- SEE DEATH AS REVERSIBLE, THROUGH MAGICAL THINKING
- MAY ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY OF DEATH
- DON'T HAVE THE LANGUAGE TO ARTICULATE FEELINGS (USE ART, PLAY, MUSIC)
- OFTEN EXPERIENCE SEPARATION ANXIETY
- MAY EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS (HEADACHES, STOMACH ACHES)
- MAY REGRESS TO EARLIER BEHAVIOR
- QUICKLY SHIFT FROM GRIEVING TO "NORMAL PLAY"
- HELP BY: MAINTAINING ROUTINE, REINFORCE THAT TEARS THAT THEY SEE ARE NATURAL, ASSURE THAT THEIR NEEDS WILL STILL BE MET, OFFER PLAY WITH THEMES OF DEATH - WHILE PROVIDING GUIDANCE

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: 6-9 YEARS

- BEGINS TO UNDERSTAND CONCEPT OF DEATH AS THEY MOVE TOWARD CONCRETE OPERATIONAL THINKING
- TEND TO BE AWARE OF IRREVERSIBILITY AND UNIVERSALITY
- MAY STILL ENGAGE IN MAGICAL THINKING
- WORRY THAT OTHERS WILL DIE
- MAY WISH THEY COULD DIE TO REJOIN THE DECEASED
- HELP BY: LISTENING TO QUESTIONS CAREFULLY. WHAT INFO ARE THEY SEEKING? ENCOURAGE CHILD TO ANSWER QUESTIONS, INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND STRESS REDUCING BEHAVIORS, WORK ON IDENTIFYING AND TALKING ABOUT FEELINGS

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: 9-12 YEARS

- PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING SKILLS
- CAN ARTICULATE FEELINGS
- EXPRESS GRIEF SPORADICALLY
- VERBALIZE NEEDS
- FIND MEANING IN THEIR LOSS
- HELP BY: PROVIDING ACCURATE INFORMATION, ENCOURAGE EXPLORATION OF OWN BELIEFS/THOUGHTS, PHYSICAL OUTLETS, RITUALS/INCLUSION

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: ADOLESCENTS

- CAN BE REFLECTIVE/ABSTRACT
- IDEAS ABOUT ILLNESS, AFTERLIFE,
- QUESTIONING, ARGUING, DEBATING, DEVELOPING MORAL AWARENESS
- GRIEF IS REGRESSIVE, CAN INTERFERE WITH TASK OF SEPARATION
- HELP BY: UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD, HONESTY, EMPATHY-BUILD TRUST, VERBAL AND NONVERBAL AVENUES FOR EXPRESSION (MUSIC, WRITING, ART, EXERCISE), CORRECT DISTORTED INFORMATION ABOUT LOSS THAT MAY LEAD TO GUILT/ANGER, REHEARSE ADAPTIVE WAYS TO COPE, ADVOCATE AND EDUCATE TO CREATE SUPPORT NETWORK

WHAT IMPACTS INDIVIDUAL GRIEF?

- CULTURE, RELIGION, DEMOGRAPHICS
- PERSONAL LOSS HISTORY
- NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED, SELF, AND OTHERS

WORDEN'S GRIEF TASKS: REALITY OF LOSS

- UNDERSTANDING OF PHYSICAL MEANING OF DEATH
- UNDERSTANDING OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANING OF LOSS
- INCLUDES UNDERSTANDING IMPACT OF LOSS/CHANGES
- SECONDARY LOSSES
- WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE PRIOR TO DEATH? WHAT IS IT LIKE NOW?

WORDEN'S GRIEF TASKS: EXPERIENCE THE PAIN

- FACING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PAIN
- COPING WITH THE PERIODIC SURGES/TRIGGERS OF PAIN
- EXPRESSING FEELINGS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIP, LOSS, CHANGES

WORDEN'S GRIEF TASKS: INVEST IN NEW RELATIONSHIPS

- HAVE ENERGY REMAINING TO ENGAGE IN ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES
- MAINTAIN AND CREATE NEW RELATIONSHIPS
- MAINTAIN INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH DECEASED
- RE-EVALUATE RELATIONSHIP WITH DECEASED
- EXPAND MEMORIES THROUGH FRIENDS AND RELATIVES
- REMEMBER REALISTICALLY
- CREATE IMAGINED MEMORIES

WORDEN'S GRIEF TASKS: INTEGRATE LOSS

- RETURN TO AGE APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENTAL TASK
- DEVELOP A NEW SENSE OF IDENTITY WHICH INCLUDES THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOSS
- MAINTAIN CONNECTION WITH DECEASED WHILE MOVING FORWARD

WORDEN'S GRIEF TASKS: FUTURE-FORWARD LOOKING

- GRIEF TYPICALLY MATURES OR PROGRESSES AS WE ADAPT TO LIFE WITHOUT OUR LOVED ONE. WE INSTINCTIVELY FIND A WAY TO LIVE THAT HAS POSSIBILITIES FOR SATISFACTION. SOME PEOPLE CALL THIS A NEW NORMAL.
- WE NEED TO ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE LOSS, RECONFIGURE OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PERSON WHO DIED AND LEARN TO FIND JOY AND SATISFACTION IN A LIFE WITHOUT THAT PERSON.

HOW CHILDREN'S GRIEF DIFFERS FROM ADULT GRIEF

- CHILDREN GRIEVE INTERMITTENTLY - THEY ARE PRESENT-ORIENTED AND UNABLE TO WITHSTAND INTENSITY OF GRIEF FOR LONG PERIODS
- CHILDREN WILL "REVISIT" THE MEANING OF THEIR LOSS AT KEY DEVELOPMENTAL POINTS
- CHILDREN'S GRIEF IS OFTEN ACTED OUT NOT TALKED OUT. BEHAVIORS CAN SERVE AGAINST PAIN AND/OR INVOKE PUNISHMENT FOR GUILT
- IDENTITY LOSS...AM I STILL A SISTER/BROTHER?

SUICIDAL RISK IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

- IRRITABILITY AND SOMATIC COMPLAINTS MAY BE MORE PROMINENT WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS
- ADOLESCENT GIRLS DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION REPORT MORE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY AND INADEQUACY IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD, WHEREAS ADOLESCENT BOYS REPORT MORE AGGRESSIVE AND ANTISOCIAL FEELINGS
- MODERATE TO HEAVY DRINKING OR DRUG ABUSE IS IMPLICATED IN AS MANY AS 50 PERCENT OF ADOLESCENT SUICIDES

POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME SYMPTOMS

- DETERIORATION IN PERSONAL HABITS
- DECLINE IN SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT
- MARKED INCREASE IN SADNESS, MOODINESS, AND SUDDEN TEARFUL REACTIONS
- LOSS OF APPETITE
- USE OF DRUGS/ALCOHOL
- TALK OF DEATH OR DYING
- WITHDRAWAL FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY
- MAKING FINAL ARRANGEMENTS, SUCH AS GIVING AWAY VALUED POSSESSIONS
- SUDDEN OR UNEXPLAINED DEPARTURE FROM PAST BEHAVIORS

HIGHEST RISK

- FEELINGS OF HOPELESSNESS
- HAS RECENTLY EXPERIENCED A DEATH OF A LOVED ONE
- SEVERE CONFLICT WITH PARENTS
- HAS LOST A CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH A KEY PEER OR A LOVE INTEREST
- LACKS A SUPPORT SYSTEM

GRIEF AFTER SELF-INFLICTED CAUSE OF DEATH: COMMON REACTIONS

- SHAME / STIGMA
- FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS
- ANGER AT ONE OR MORE OF THESE : DECEASED, SELF, OTHERS IN SOCIAL NETWORK OF THE DECEASED, INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS (I.E. MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS), THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE
- SORROW OVER THE LIFE, NOT JUST THE DEATH
- FEEL RESPONSIBILITY / GUILT
- SOCIAL SHUNNING AND ISOLATION BY THE COMMUNITY

DISENFRANCHISED LOSS

- "THE GRIEF THAT PERSONS EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY INCUR A LOSS THAT IS NOT OR CANNOT BE OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGED, PUBLICLY MOURNED, OR SOCIAL SUPPORTED."
- APPLIED TO CERTAIN TYPES OF DEATHS (SUICIDE, ADDICTION ACCIDENT, MISCARRIAGE) - SO THOSE PEOPLE ARE GAINING A LOT LESS SUPPORT FROM LOVED ONES AND THE COMMUNITY

COMPLICATED GRIEF

- YEARNING
- LONGING
- FREQUENT THOUGHTS OF THE PERSON WHO DIED
- RETAIN A STRONG INTEREST IN A DECEASED LOVED ONE AND EXPERIENCE POSITIVE EMOTIONS WHEN THINKING ABOUT THAT PERSON
- ALL OF THE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE SHARPLY FOCUSED ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES OR CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEATH.

COMPLICATED GRIEF

- RECURRENT TROUBLING THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DEATH (EG: THINKING OVER AND OVER THAT SOMEONE COULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING DIFFERENT THAT WOULD HAVE PREVENTED THIS DEATH)
- BEHAVIORS TO TRY TO BLOCK OUT THE PAINFUL REALITY (LEAVING A ROOM OR POSSESSIONS UNTOUCHED, SPENDING A LOT OF TIME DAY DREAMING ABOUT BEING WITH THE DECEASED PERSON OR PROTECT ONESELF FROM BEING REMINDED OF THEM, TRYING TO AVOID PEOPLE PLACES OR THINGS THAT THEY USED TO DO WITH THE DECEASED PERSON)
- FEELINGS LIKE GUILT OR ANGER THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL

COMPLICATED GRIEF: RISK FACTORS

- FEMALES APPEAR TO BE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE THAN MALES
- INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE VULNERABLE TO MOOD OR ANXIETY DISORDERS
- THOSE WHO HAD A DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR PARENTS GROWING UP
- LOSING A LOVED ONE IN A SUDDEN, VIOLENT WAY

ASSESSMENT OF GRIEVING YOUTH

- INDIVIDUAL CAPACITIES (PERSONALITY, DEVELOPMENT, PAST, FAMILY, CULTURE)
- FACTORS RELATED TO DEATH (TYPE OF DEATH, SHARED RELATIONSHIP)
- CLASS DYNAMIC, FRIENDSHIPS, SUPPORT SYSTEM
- PAST GRIEF HISTORY

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

- WHAT DO I DO NOW THAT I SURVIVED?
- NEED TO FEEL RELIEF FROM UNBEARABLE EMOTIONAL PAIN
- "I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LIVE"
- SOME ARE ANGRY THEY SURVIVED
- EMBARRASSMENT, SHAME, GUILT
- MAY FEEL THEY SURVIVED FOR A "REASON"

EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

- MUST BE CLEAR, HONEST, NO EUPHEMISMS
- CONSIDER CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL
- TALK IN SECURE SAFE ENVIRONMENT
- IMPORTANT FOR CHILD/TEEN TO KNOW HE/SHE IS LOVED, WILL BE TAKEN CARE OF, NEEDS WILL BE MET - EVEN IN THE FACE OF GRIEVING CAREGIVERS
- WANT TO GIVE THE MESSAGE THAT GRIEF IS NORMAL AND IT WILL BECOME EASIER
- NORMALIZE FEELINGS

HOW TO HELP AS A CCLS

- ACTIVELY LISTEN, WITHOUT JUDGMENT, CRITICISM, OR PREJUDICE, TO WHAT THE SURVIVOR IS TELLING YOU.
- ASK THE SURVIVOR IF AND HOW YOU CAN HELP. THEY MAY NOT BE READY TO SHARE AND MAY WANT TO GRIEVE PRIVATELY BEFORE ACCEPTING HELP.
- LET THEM TALK AT THEIR OWN PACE; THEY WILL SHARE WITH YOU WHEN (AND WHAT) THEY ARE READY TO.
- BE PATIENT. REPETITION IS PART OF HEALING, AND AS SUCH YOU MAY HEAR THE SAME STORY MULTIPLE TIMES. REPETITION IS PART OF THE HEALING PROCESS AND SURVIVORS NEED TO TELL THEIR STORY AS MANY TIMES AS IT IS NECESSARY.
- USED THE LOVED ONE'S NAME INSTEAD OF "HE" OR "SHE". THIS HUMANIZES THE DECEDENT; THE USE OF THE DECEDENT'S NAME WILL BE COMFORTING.

HOW TO HELP AS A CCLS

- YOU MAY NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY, AND THAT'S OKAY. YOUR PRESENCE AND UNCONDITIONAL LISTENING IS WHAT A SURVIVOR IS LOOKING FOR.
- YOU CANNOT LEAD SOMEONE THROUGH THEIR GRIEF. THE JOURNEY IS PERSONAL AND UNIQUE TO THE INDIVIDUAL. DO NOT TELL THEM HOW THEY SHOULD ACT, WHAT THEY SHOULD FEEL, OR THAT THEY SHOULD FEEL BETTER "BY NOW".
- AVOID STATEMENTS LIKE "I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL"; UNLESS YOU ARE A SURVIVOR, YOU CAN ONLY EMPATHIZE WITH HOW THEY FEEL.

INTERVENTIONS

- IDENTIFY LOSS - ART
- EDUCATE TO ADJUST ANY WRONG THINKING
- IDENTIFY DOUBLE DIP FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH LOSS
- CREATE RITUALS TO SAY GOODBYE AND INTEGRATED EXPERIENCES TOWARD ADJUSTED FUTURE -
- PLAY OR ART THERAPY IS ANOTHER STRUCTURED TREATMENT FOR ANGER RELATED TO GRIEF.

INTERVENTIONS

- BROKEN VASE ACTIVITY
- -LETTER TO DECEASED CHILD/LETTER TO HEAVEN
- -MEMORY BOX
- -BUBBLES ACTIVITY: BLOW BUBBLES AT YOUR TABLE AND TRY TO CATCH SOME ON YOUR HAND / YOU CAN'T SEE THE BUBBLES AFTER THEY POP BUT YOU CAN STILL FEEL THE COOL WET BUBBLE WHERE IT POPPED/YOU CAN'T SEE YOUR LOVED ONE ANYMORE IN THEIR HUMAN FORM BUT YOU CAN STILL FEEL THEM.

INTERVENTIONS

- MARBLE JAR
- -HOPE BOX (FOR SURVIVORS) - CONTAIN ANYTHING THAT MIGHT HELP YOU PUT ASIDE PAINFUL THOUGHTS OR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND INSTEAD REMIND YOU OF THINGS IN LIFE THAT YOU ENJOY. DECORATING THE BOX CAN BE FUN, AS WELL. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR THINGS TO INCLUDE: • PHOTOS OR LETTERS FROM PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT. • POEMS, BOOKS, OR SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT LIFT YOU UP. • MOVIES OR MUSIC YOU LIKE. • NOTE CARDS WITH UPLIFTING WORDS OR THOUGHTS, THINGS THAT HAVE KEPT YOU GOING IN THE PAST, OR MEMORIES OF HAPPY TIMES. • SPECIAL TRINKETS OR MEMENTOS THAT HELP YOU FEEL GROUNDED. • YOUR SAFETY PLAN.
- -PLAY THERAPY: BOOKS, FIGURES, SAND/BEAN BOX, DOLL HOUSE, FELT BOARD, PAPER DOLLS, CARS, BALLS/SPORTS, BEAN BAGS/PUNCHING BAGS, RECYCLED ITEMS

INTERVENTIONS

- INTRODUCE LOVED ONE / OR MISSING PERSON WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU WISH - TROPHY/CLAY/COLLAGES
- CHANGES: HOW YOUR LIFE IS DIFFERENT (IMAGINED OR REAL) - BEFORE AND AFTER DRAWINGS, HANDOUT
- IDENTIFY FEELINGS - CREPE PAPER EXERCISE
- COPING WITH FEELINGS - DEAR ABBEY, LETTERS, ADDRESS FEELINGS OF GUILT, ANGER
- MEMORIES - FOOD POTLUCK, ITEMS, JOURNALS
- SELF-CARE - EMPATHY-TOOL KITS, DRAW NAMES, SILLY PUTTY

MEDIA AND PLAY CONSIDERATIONS

- STRUCTURED MEDIA - LIMITS EXPRESSION, FOSTERS CONTAINMENT – PENCILS, COLLAGES, MOSAIC, WEAVING, BOARD GAMES, CRAFT PROJECT
- EXPRESSIVE MEDIA - MOST CHILDREN FAMILIAR
– MARKERS, PASTELS, PAINT WITH SMALL BRUSHES, CLAY, DOLL HOUSE, FAMILY FIGURES, PUPPET, DOCTOR KIT, SUPER HEROES
- UNSTRUCTURED MEDIA-FOSTERS EXPRESSION OF PRIMARY PROCESS THINKING, CAN ELICIT EVOCATIVE EMOTION :WATERCOLORS, LARGE BRUSHES, FINGER PAINT, CLAY WITH WATER, POUNDING NAILS, THROWING EGGS

QUESTIONS?
