

Grief and Loss

The background is a solid teal color. At the bottom right corner, there is a silhouette of a mountain range in a slightly darker shade of teal.

What You Will Learn...

- ◆ Definitions of Grief and Loss
- ◆ Stages of Grief
- ◆ How Grief Affects Children
- ◆ How to Build Coping Skills around Grief Issues

What is Grief and Loss?

- ◆ Grief and loss are emotions that are commonly felt when someone is experiencing the death or loss of someone in their life
- ◆ The children we work with may have someone close to them pass away or are experiencing a loss just from being apart from their family, whether in a group home or in foster care

- ◆ Children and adolescents may experience grief differently from adults
- ◆ When working with children experiencing any type of loss, remember developmental awareness is key

Stages of Grief

- ◆ Kübler-Ross proposed these stages of grief:
 - Denial
 - Anger
 - Bargaining
 - Depression
 - Acceptance

Denial

- ◆ At first, we tend to deny the loss has taken place, and may withdraw from our usual social contacts. This stage may last a few moments, or longer.
- ◆ In residential care it may look like, "My family will be here soon to pick me up." The child stands by the door and waits, peering out the window from time to time.

Anger

- ◆ May be furious at the person who inflicted the hurt (even if she's dead), or at the world, for letting it happen
- ◆ May be angry with himself for letting the event take place, even if, realistically, nothing could have stopped it
- ◆ In residential care, "I hate Social Workers. They don't understand anything about my family" or "Police officers lied about my dad. He wouldn't do any of the things they said he did."
- ◆ The child may cry uncontrollably or become angry at the foster/adoptive parents for making simple requests like asking them to get ready for bed or being told "no".

Bargaining

- ◆ Now the grieving person may make bargains with God, asking, "If I do this, will you take away the loss?"
- ◆ In residential care, the child may now realize that they will be in the foster/adoptive home for some time. "If I'm allowed to go home I'll be the best kid. I will help keep the house clean. I will get the top grades in school."

Depression

- ◆ The person feels numb, although anger and sadness may remain underneath.
- ◆ In residential care, "Who is going to take care of me? Did I make this happen? I give up. Why me? I'm so alone."

Acceptance

- ◆ This is when the anger, sadness and mourning have tapered off. The person simply accepts the reality of the loss.
- ◆ "I'm here in this home, but I'm safe. This is not my fault. I did not make this happen. Adults make choices for me. I need to do my best to share my feelings with adults around me that I trust. I will get through this and be OK."

Stages of Grief

- ◆ Some children may get stuck in a stage, like "Anger". Others will bounce between stages many times before hitting "Understanding". And still others will "Bargain", before going through "Denial".

Different Age Groups

- ◆ We will now look at the reactions of children in different developmental stages
 - Birth to Two Years
 - Ages Two to Five
 - Ages Six to Nine
 - Ages Nine to Twelve
 - Adolescence (Ages Thirteen to Nineteen)

Birth- 2 years

- ◆ impact the sense of security and well-being in the world
- ◆ sensitive to changes in routine and stress in their environment
- ◆ child may display excessive crying, writhing, rocking, biting and other anxiety related behaviors

Ages Two to Five

- ◆ may have feelings of sadness, anxiety, insecurity, irritability and anger
- ◆ believe that death is a temporary state that can be reversed
- ◆ may equate death with sleeping or being away on a trip
- ◆ believe their thoughts or behaviors caused the death of their loved one
- ◆ some may act as if nothing happened, while others may exhibit regressive behaviors, such as bedwetting or excessive clinging

Ages Six to Nine

- ◆ are able to consider the biology of death and grasp its finality
- ◆ may develop fears associated with their own death or the death of a surviving parent
- ◆ feelings of insecurity may be expressed in a reluctance to separate from caregivers
- ◆ some may be hyperactive, aggressive and disruptive, while others are withdrawn and sad
- ◆ may have nightmares, difficulty sleeping through the night, or display regressive behaviors

Ages Nine to Twelve

- ◆ understand that death is final and that it happens to everyone
- ◆ fears and worries associated with the loss may be heightened by the physical occurring within their own bodies
- ◆ they may have a strong need to control their feelings while at the same time they have great difficulty doing so
- ◆ because friends are so important to this age group, preteens may feel socially isolated, lonely, confused, scared, guilty and self-conscious

Adolescence (Ages Thirteen to Nineteen)

- ◆ may have a need to feel “strong”, in control of their emotions and “indistinguishable” from their friends
- ◆ may hide their emotions of grief by engaging in risk-taking behaviors
 - such as reckless driving
 - alcohol and drug use
 - sexual promiscuity
 - defiance of authority.
- ◆ may be reluctant (or unable) to express their feelings with others
 - sadness
 - loneliness
 - confusion
 - fear
 - guilt
 - anxiety.
- ◆ may become more easily distracted, experience sleeping and eating disturbances, perform better or worse in school, and display strong emotional mood changes
- ◆ like adults, adolescents may have difficulty coping the loss for months or years

Use of Proper Language

- ◆ A discussion about death should include the proper words, such as cancer, died, and death. Substitute words or phrases (for example, "he passed away," "he is sleeping," or "we lost him") should never be used because they can confuse children and lead to misunderstandings
- ◆ During a move to a foster home or group home, making sure the child knows what is going on and what it means

Ways to Help the Child Cope

- ◆ Involve the child in activities like dance, sports, or clubs
- ◆ Help the child work on his/her life book (if you are not familiar contact the consultant)
- ◆ **Listen** to the child when he/she decide to talk about their birth families
- ◆ Give the child a journal. **Help** him/her get started. If they are too young to write, they can draw.
- ◆ Find a grief group for the child. Take the child to regular therapy if needed.
- ◆ **Support** the child before and after family visitation. Prepare yourself and know that the child may act out. Start a tradition of doing something after visitation if possible. Go get ice cream, go for a walk, or take a drive. This gives the child time to talk about the visit and relax.

Summary

- ◆ As professionals and foster parents, a key part to working with a child with grief and loss issues, whether it be death or a loss of something else, is to remember to be empathetic and understanding. Every child will handle grief differently, and probably different from you. This is ok and expected. Be open.
- ◆ Remember to address the behaviors discussed earlier, while maintaining empathy to the child's feelings.

Post-Test

please turn in to your Program Consultant when complete

- ◆ 1. Name an example of something that causes grief. _____
- ◆ 2. When working with children what do we need to remember? _____
- ◆ 3. Name 3 stages of grief
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
- ◆ 4. Of the 3 stages mentioned above. Name a common behavior/statement of a foster child in that stage. _____
- ◆ 5. Pick an age group and discuss common reactions to grief _____
- ◆ 6. Pick a different age group _____
- ◆ 7. Name 3 ways to help a child cope with grief
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- ◆ 8. List a reason to use proper language with a child.

- ◆ 9. Name one thing you learned from this training other than what has previously be asked. _____