

Interdisciplinary End of Life Symposium

Grief in Children & Families

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Disclosures

- I do not have any relevant financial relationships.

This presentation and/or comments will provide a balanced, non-promotional, and evidence-based approach to all diagnostic, therapeutic and/or research related content.

Cultural Linguistic Competency (CLC) & Implicit Bias (IB)

STATE LAW:

The California legislature has passed Assembly Bill (AB) 1195, which states that as of July 1, 2006, all Category 1 CME activities that relate to patient care must include a cultural diversity/linguistics component. It has also passed AB 241, which states that as of January 1, 2022, all continuing education courses for a physician and surgeon **must** contain curriculum that includes specified instruction in the understanding of implicit bias in medical treatment.

The cultural and linguistic competency (CLC) and implicit bias (IB) definitions reiterate how patients' diverse backgrounds may impact their access to care.

EXEMPTION:

Business and Professions Code 2190.1 exempts activities which are dedicated solely to research or other issues that do not contain a direct patient care component.

The following CLC & IB components will be addressed in this presentation:

- *Age, socioeconomic status, faith, and cultural/ethnic views on death*
- *Grief in children (whether and how children grieve)*

Working with Grieving Children and Teens

Grieving Children – The Statistics

According to the JAG Institute's Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model, *1 in 12 children in the U.S.* will experience the death of a parent or sibling before they reach the age of 18.

1,192 children were newly bereaved in the U.S. each day.



Developmental Stage of Grief: Ages 2-4 Years Old

- This age group will see death as reversible. They don't understand death is permanent.
- They express themselves through behavior and play.
- Statements they may say:
 - My Mom Died.
 - When will she come back?
 - Will you die too?

Developmental Responses to Grief: Ages 2-4 Years Old

General
Anxiety

Crying

Clinginess

Temper
Tantrums

Repetitive
Questions

Regression

Interventions: Ages 2-4 Years Old

Ways to help:

- Create consistent routine
- Avoid euphemisms (gone, lost, passed on)
- Provide opportunities for play
- Offer lots of nurturing



Conversation Starters: 2-4 Years Old

Who was your special person?

What was your favorite thing to do together with your special person?

What are the feelings you're having now that your special person has died?

Tell me your strongest feeling about your special person that died.



Developmental Stage Grief: Ages 5-8 Years Old

- Children are exploring their independence. They are concrete thinkers, with tendency toward magical thinking.
- They still can see death as reversible. They feel responsible and worry their thoughts or wishes caused the death.

Developmental Responses to Grief: Ages 5-8 Years Old

Disrupted sleep

Repetitive questions

Concerns about safety / abandonment

Short periods of strong reaction

Behavior changes

Physical complaints



Interventions: Ages 5-8 Years Old

Ways to help:

- Allow children to talk about the experience
- Be prepared for repetitive questions
- Use honest concrete language
- Avoid euphemisms (gone, lost and passed on)

Conversation Starters: 5-8 Years Old

What did you and your special person that died do together?

What was your special person that died like?

What feelings have you felt since your special person died?

How has your family shared their feelings?



Developmental Stages of Grief: Ages 9 – 12 Years Old

- School aged children may still be concrete thinkers but are beginning to understand abstract ideas.
- They have close connections with friends and activities outside of the home

Developmental Responses to Grief: Ages 9-12 Years Old

Anxiety and concern for safety of others

Difficulty concentrating and focusing

Nightmares and intrusive thoughts

Wide variety of emotions

Stomach aches

Headaches



Interventions: Ages 9 – 12 Years Old

Ways to help:

- Speak honestly, even though they are starting to understand abstract thought, it's still good not to use euphemisms
- Identify people and activities that help them feel safe and supported
- Model expressing emotions and self-care
- Provide activities for expression: Talk, art, physical activity, play and writing.

Conversation Starters: 9-12 Years Old

Can you tell me something special about your special person that died?

What did you and your special person do together?

Who is someone you can share memories with?

What feelings have you felt since your special person died?

What is something you will always remember about the person who died?

Developmental Stage Grief: Ages 13 – 18 Years Old

- Teens can process abstract concepts.
- They see themselves as unique individuals
- There is significant changes in their priorities
- Teens rely on peer and others outside the family for support



Developmental Responses to Grief: Ages 13-18 Years Old

Withdrawal from family; focused on connections with peers

Increased risk taking

Inability to concentrate (school difficulties)

Intense emotional reactions

Attempts to take on caregiving / parental role with siblings

Thoughts of suicide and self-care



Interventions: Ages 13-18 Years Old

Ways to help:

- Reinforce assurances of safety and security, even if they don't express any concerns.
- Maintain routines and set clear expectations
- Allow for expression of feelings without trying to fix, or take them away
- Answer questions honestly, even the hard ones.
- Ask open ended questions
- Model appropriate expressions of grief and ideas for self care

Conversation Starters: Teens

Have you ever lost anyone? Tell me about that person or pet.

What is something you remember about your loved one?

Tell me a story about a time that you and your loved one went on a vacation?

Tell me a story about your favorite holiday with your loved one.

What is the most difficult thing for you since your loved one passed?

Who are the people who have supported you the most during this difficult time?

Is there a time that you're expecting to be more difficult than others?
(holidays/graduation/prom)



Summing It Up: Final Tips for Supporting Grieving Families with Children and Teens



The MOST Important Intervention: *Age-Appropriate Honesty*



- Often after a death, children and teens feel confused.
- No one can keep death from children and teens.
- No one can take their pain away.
- Offer opportunities for children and teens to ask question regarding the death.
- Adult family members need to model appropriate grieving behavior – it's ok to have feelings, cry and grieve

Final Tips for Working with Grieving Families

- Offer space and support for all to express their grief
- Everyone should be able to express grief: normalize feelings of grief
- Offer opportunities for remembrance
 - Memorials
 - Memory activities
 - Journaling
- Provide ongoing support
- *REMEMBER: Grief is an ongoing process that is constantly changing. There is no “moving on” from a loss. Grief will often be experienced in new ways at each new developmental level or experience of personal accomplishment.*

Resources

Books

- *I Will Remember You – What To Do When Someone You Love Dies; A Guidebook Through Grief For Teens*: Laura Dower
- *The Creative Journal for Teens – Making Friends With Yourself*: Lucia Capacchione, PhD
- *Surviving the Death of a Sibling*: T.J. Wray
- *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*: Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
- *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Handbook for Children*: Michaelene Mundy

Websites

- National Alliance for Grieving Children: <https://childrengrieve.org/>
- The Dougy Center: <https://www.dougy.org/>
- Sesame Workshop (Sesame Street): <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/grief/>

Podcasts

- **Help 2 Make Sense**: is geared towards children and young adults who have experienced loss. Episodes include going back to school while grieving, and the death of a sibling.
- **Grief Out Loud**: With a mix of personal stories, tips for supporting children, teens, and yourself, and interviews with bereavement professionals, the Grief Out Loud podcast is a great resource for the bereaved. It is hosted by Jana DeCristofaro and produced by The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families in Portland, Oregon.

Thank

You