

Grief and Trauma Discussion Guides

Four Tasks of Mourning

1. To Accept the Reality of the Loss

Denial is not an uncommon response when faced with a loss. Acceptance of a death involves crossing not only an intellectual but also an emotional barrier.

- Deny the facts - (From continuing to set table to saying, "He lives on in his son.!")
- Deny the meaning or importance of the loss sustained
- Deny the irreversibility of death

2. To work through the Pain of Grief

"Anything that continually allows the person to avoid or suppress this pain can be expected to prolong the course of mourning."

Bereavement Studies of Grief in Adult Life
C.M. Parkes (1972)

- Many in society are not be comfortable with another's grief. Some mourners try to distract him from the pain he feels but not permitting:
 - ◆ expression of painful feelings
 - ◆ discussion of painful thoughts.
- Some bereaved people:
 - ◆ medicate themselves
 - ◆ immediately immerse themselves in work and travel.

3. To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

- Coming to grips with the tasks of living along, managing a home alone, raising a family by oneself.
- Taking on skills which the deceased formerly performed.
- Developing an independent sense of self, a sense of control of one's life.
- Need to gain a new meaning for life.

4. To Emotionally Relocate the Deceased on Move On

- The task is not to forget the deceased but to find a less painful place for him is one's emotional makeup.
- An ability to move beyond the sticking point of grief to living effectively.

SIX MESSAGES YOUNG GRIEVERS NEED TO HEAR

1. Emotional pain, like physical pain, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Physical wounds do not heal without time and attention the same is true of emotional wounds.
2. Responses to loss are varied and do not necessarily manifest the degree of grief one feels. Some people shed tears readily, others do not. The only "bad" grief is that which is unexpressed.
3. Our bad thoughts or words do not cause others to die. Likewise, our "if only's" --- "If only I told someone about her talk of suicide" – could not have prevented the death.
4. Feeling anger at the person who died or at God or the world in general is normal when grieving....Accepting and acknowledging feelings rather than avoiding them helps relieve the pain of the grief experience.
5. Most grieving individuals must resolve certain tasks related to grief before they find relief from their emotional pain. Young grievers need to be taught about death with these tasks in mind and facilitated in their progress to accomplish them.
6. Recovery is not a straight shot, but rather takes place in an upward, but jagged pattern. There will be good days and bad.

Death in the School Community
Martha Oates, 1993

ENCOURAGE ALL INVOLVED IN HELPING CHILDREN DO GRIEF WORK TO:

1. Listen actively to each child with whom they come into contact in order to learn what that particular child does or does not understand about death.
2. Inquire as to the precise focus of the conceptual task(s) of mourning with which that child is struggling.
3. Let the child tell us what feeling, thoughts, and possible statements from others which still confuse him about death.

Children Mourning; Mourning Children
Kenneth Doka (1995)

Group Counseling – Bereavement Group

General Design

Session I: Investigating Reactions to the Death of a Loved One in a Group Setting

Outcomes

1. Realization that each member of group is not alone in his/her grief
2. Appreciate different perceptions and feelings about death among group.
3. Share memories of death of loved one with

Strategies

1. Establish purpose for discussing grief in group setting
2. Set group rules with participants, especially trust and respect.
3. Have each member select a feeling card and describe a related situation.
4. Invite each member to share a death experience.
5. Ask each one to think about a deceased loved one and share a memory.

Note: This can be done by drawing, puppetry, clay figures, etc.

Session II: Learning About Grief Feelings and their Affect on Oneself

Outcomes:

1. Increased acceptance of commonality of reactions to death.
2. Understanding relationship between grief and how group members feel about themselves.
3. Identify what children want to feel better about as they talk about their experiences with the deaths of loved ones.

Strategies

1. List positive qualities about yourself in a pretend interview.
2. Identify feelings and thoughts associated with a grief experience. List.
3. Relate group members' experiences about deaths of loved ones to previously identified feelings and thoughts in last.
4. Invite children to draw past, present, and future pictures describing how they, felt when their loved one died, how they are feeling now in the group, and how they hope to feel as they share their stories with group members.
5. Clarify feelings and thoughts related to own worth.

Session III: Sharing Memories of a *loved* One who Died

Outcomes

1. Acknowledge that a loved one does not have to be idealized to be an important memory. We can love and still be upset with the same person.
2. Realize that the memories of the deceased will remain; the pain will lessen as one continues to talk about him and share the influence he had on an individual.
3. Validate important roles each deceased loved one played in the lives of group members.

Strategies

1. Group member will explore both negative and positive memories of deceased loved ones by using incomplete sentences such as [*still sometimes blame myself for... I'm sorry that... If only I had be able to... still get upset with _____ about the time....*
2. Group members will share "linking objects" such as pictures, personal items, stories the loved one liked, etc. They will be asked to describe what they brought and explain how it became so important.

Session IV: The Funeral; Saying Goodbye

Outcomes:

1. Resolve disconcerting experiences or questions related to wake and funeral.
*When death occurred, I remember my parents...
The thing I didn't understand at the funeral was*
2. Complete the first phase of mourning if not yet achieved.
3. Appreciation of how life has changed as a result of responses to the death.

Strategies:

1. Reliving memories of the loved one's funeral (Drawing or a felt story board of what they saw would be a good initial activity.)
2. Answer questions and concerns about wake experiences. Examine how difficult it was for each child to come back to school following the death.
3. Explore how members said farewell to loved ones; initiate a leave-taking activity (e.g. Letter writing) if last goodbyes have not been accomplished.
4. Explain to children how to create a memory book of their loved one to share with other members of the family

Session V: Coping 'With the Loss of a Loved One .

Outcomes

1. Bring closure to group process and group members' grief work.
2. Assess individual member's level of adjustment to loss by asking them to list the things they have done during group discussion.
3. Acceptance of follow-up tasks designed to reduce stress.

Strategies

1. Test out members' inadequate cognitions or feelings about death of loved one.
(*"[used to think that his death was _____ NOW I know that _____"*)
2. Review learnings which have taken place. *I used to believe that _____ was my fault. Now I know that _____.*
3. Read from writings of those who have overcome their grief.(Bibliotherapy)

Design adapted from:
Bereavement Support Group Program
Haasl and Marmocha (1990)

Activities

In the beginning

metaphors *to* build cohesion: chains, puzzle pieces, rainbows, etc.

introduction activities: find *someone*, pair introductions (stand behind),

name tags activities (be sure to include one object related to purpose of the group, labels)

bibliotherapy

values clarification activities videos

In the middle

empty chairs

"How I see me, *How Others See Me*"

Mixed Messages

"*It Scares Me Most*"

"I Miss"

Trash *Can*

Anger Letter

"I Wish"

Letter to...(parent, God, step-parent, old friend, alcohol, drugs, etc.)

Role plays

Dear Abby, Oprah, Jessie

At the ending

Metaphor revisited

Strength bombardment

"I Used to Think, But Now I Know."

Also always appropriate

paper plates

Styrofoam cups

whistle, balloons

books, poetry, music

clay, play dough, songs

pictures, magazines

*drawing materials

**GENERAL BEREAVEMENT
PROCESSING QUESTIONS
(for children)**



- Using a bibliotherapeutic approach, say,

*The child in this story talked a lot about his feelings.
Let's make a list of them.*

Which of these are you still feeling?

Have you had any others which weren't discussed ?"

- Invite the child or group to make a picture of a feeling they have about death.

Please tell us something about your picture.

- Older children could use "Then and Now" panel drawings.

How have your feelings changed? What feelings do you still have and how are they affecting you?

GENERAL BEREAVEMENT PROCESSING QUESTIONS

(for pre-teens)

- Using a bibliotherapeutic approach, say,

What feeling made the greatest impression on you? When have you felt this way? ... Describe the situation for me...Did you have any thoughts at that time that still concern you?

- Invite the young person(s) to write out their feeling on large sheet of newsprint.

Let's recall and list some of the feelings you've experienced...

What do you think were the reasons for your anger? How did you express it?

Normalize feelings. Grief is like mental nausea, throwing up emotionally..... Develop an activity to write out feelings and eventually throw them away.

- Ask, *How has your life changed since _____ died? ... What are things people say to you about _____'s death which don't help? What are people doing [] that upset you?*

ASSISTING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS CLARIFY ISSUES RELATED TO TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

- WHAT THINGS IN THIS SITUATION CONCERN YOU?
- WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU'RE TO ASK, *What if.....?* ABOUT?
- OF THE *What ifs* YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT, WHAT'S THE WORST?
- WHAT ARE YOU SAYING TO YOURSELF WHEN YOU WORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AND COULD HAVE HAPPENED?
- WHAT HELPS AT THAT TIME?
- ARE THERE OTHER THINGS WHICH YOU COULD DO TO HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS?

SUGGESTED 5 or 6 LESSON OUTLINE FOR COUNSELING KIDS ABOUT CRISES

- 1. DEFINE THE WORD "CRISIS" TYPES OF CRISES
(BRAINSTORMING).**
- 2. WRITE (DRAW) A STORY ABOUT A CRISIS YOU KNOW OR
HEARD ABOUT.**
- 3-4. UNDERSTANDING YOUR:**
 - FEELINGS**
 - THOUGHTS**
 - WHAT YOU DID**
 - WHAT YOU THINK YOU COULD DO IN A CRISIS.**
- 5. WHO AND WHAT HELPED IN A CRISIS?
HOW DID YOU HELP OTHERS?**
- 6. SUMMING UP THINGS**
 - WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT CRISES?**
 - WHAT CAN WE AND OTHERS DO TO HELP IN A CRISIS?**

GENERAL BEREAVEMENT PROCESSING QUESTIONS (for adolescents)

- **Using a counseling approach, develop a needs assessment with your client.**

Which feeling about death do you think is most difficult for teens to express or discuss?

...Describe a situation in which that happened to you. How can adults be most helpful to teens who are experiencing grief?

- **Invite an adolescent to complete a loss inventory.**

Let's recall and list some of the losses, including death experiences you've experienced in your life so far.

- **It is still beneficial to explore the impact of strong feelings on teens' reactive behaviors. It is even more helpful to examine their related thoughts about death, blame, existential issues. So, what are you asking?**
- **Ask, How has your life changed since _____ died? ... What are things which people say or do related to _____'s death which don't help?**

Adolescent Grief

Group Counseling Ideas

Teens are morbid in general.

Public mourning is often theatrical and hysterical.

Others, afraid of emotions or falsely thinking they must be in control, refuse to grieve.

Offer them an opportunity to mourn in small, self selected groups.

Want to be recognized as a family of survivors if a peer dies.

- Principal and teachers can acknowledge that they have suffered a significant loss.
- Right to participate in leave-taking ceremonies.

Normalize their feelings through an open discussion of their loss- anger ——— resentment
guilt ——— secrets.

Defuse rumors which may result from their desire to assign blame. They have the right to be informed concerning manner of death.

Encourage them to help one another. They can produce something tangible--a group, a gift, a memory book for parents, books on suicide prevention for the library.

Discuss how to behave at the funeral home.