

Counseling interventions for children experiencing normal grief essay

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Counseling Interventions for Children Experiencing Normal Grief Grief

is a strong emotional response to any loss or psychological distress caused by the death of a loved one, a tragic accident, or when suffering from incurable disease etc. Children experience the grief in the same way as the elders do, depending upon their developmental stage. The persistency and severity of grief would generally dictate the nature and type of intervention required. Children undergoing the normal grief may exhibit intense yearning, intrusive thoughts and images, and/or a range of unhappy emotions but the important thing is that these symptoms do not persist and gradually subside.

A child returns to normal life activities and the loss is integrated into the bereaved child's on-going life. During the process of loss integration, the painful feelings lessen and ultimately cease to dominate the mind of the bereaving child. With regard to the treatment, the normal grief generally does not require any serious medical or psychological intervention except for emotional support and counseling to the children suffering from grief. It is however very important to note that the normal grieving process can also become complicated for certain vulnerable children who lack emotional support and they would definitely require professional intervention right from the outset. This paper has been designed to highlight various interventions which may help a child in overcoming normal grief, that would also eventually prevent the normal grief from transforming into complicated one. The paper will focus on the grief stemming from the death of a loved one, since it is the most serious incident which can upset a child's life to imperceptible limits.

Help Children in Acknowledging the Death Children can not easily comprehend the meanings and implication of death. They need constant emotional support and should be made to understand that the death is a one way journey to another world, depending upon their religious beliefs. It is a harsh reality and innocent minds do not accept it immediately. This process should be slow and gradual. Even if the children understand that their loved one was going forever, the death still can come as a surprise. They need time to acknowledge it and get over with their grief through natural healing process supported with opportunities to have a meaningful way of saying goodbye to their loved one (Switzer, 1974).

A few practical suggestions in this regard are: Make the grieving child to write a goodbye note on a balloon and let it go. Let the child write a goodbye letter, poem, or draw a picture and place it in the belongings of the death person. Help the child in making a goodbye present and keep it in the belongings of the deceased or give it away to some needy person. Take the child to the cemetery and tell the loved one goodbye. This will eventually help the child in acknowledging the death as something real and normal in human life. Children Need to Remember Seclusion from reality is not the solution to get over with the grief. More so, writing a goodbye note does not imply that a child will stop thinking about the dead person.

The memories with the grieving child have to be canalized in the right direction instead of trying to block them. It is a common mistake to make a rule of not mentioning the dead person or talk about him/her (Grollman, 1990). You can make the child to stop talking but cannot force him/her to

stop thinking. Grieving child should be helped in creating new kind of relationship with the loved one who is gone forever by remembering and embracing memories (Fitzgerald, 1992). It is however very essential to know what sort of memories a child is perceiving.

If the memories are concerning any emotional or physical abuse, professional help will be needed. For this purpose, a child should be asked occasionally about his or her memories. A child can be provided with a scrap book to register the memories as well. Some pictures of the deceased person should also be kept in the house or if possible on the walls. This will prevent a child from extending his/her own imagination in thinking about the loved one. Few other suggestions (Anderson, 1986) in remembering the loved ones are: Let the child to take flowers to the place where the deceased person worked. Help the child in making a simple website in memory of the loved one and post pictures/ messages there. Request your loved one's favorite song on the radio.

Take the child on a vacation to the favorite spot of the deceased person or on a trip which the deceased person had desired to go. Let the Children to

Express the Pain of Loss A very useful counseling advise in helping a child undergoing a normal grief is to make him/her understand that grieving is a normal process and let him/her express the pain of loss (Grollman, 1990). As it is commonly said that if you cry out the pain, it will subside quickly. If you keep the anger and pain within yourself, it will remain there for a very long time, and will keep haunting you. Same is true for children as

well. However, their way of expressing the pain and anger will be different from adults and will depend upon the stage of their development.

Their reactions will also depend on who died, how long the individual had been sick, and how prepared they were for the death. For toddler, the death has no meanings. Their way of expressing the loss is by repeatedly looking for the missing person.

If they can talk, they will ask for the person again and again. Towards the worst, regressive behaviors may be noted like the toddler may become disinterested in food, toys, or other activities. The child may temporarily stop talking or even go back to crawling. The feelings of the toddlers can be quickly overcome by providing physical comfort to the child. Hanging enlarged pictures of the deceased person on walls and giving the child with the picture or some familiar item belonging to the deceased can also help the toddler in stop looking for him/her. Moreover, keeping the toddler busy with other children of same age will also bring positive results (Fitzgerald, 1992). For children out of infancy but under 12 years, death may carry very abstract meanings. They may not cry or exhibit grief and even go outside to play shortly after hearing the news of death.

However, they do grieve but their expression of grief and pain may be different. Children in these ages fully understand that the dead person is gone forever, but their inability to comprehend the reasons behind death keeps them confused and mystified. Their expression of pain will usually encompass inquisitiveness and inquiries, and they will portray their feelings

through drawing and role playing (Anderson, 1986). Children in upper age limit of this group may try to hold onto their loved one by adapting his or her behaviors or mannerisms.

They feel more attached to photographs and objects belonging to the deceased person. In schools, they may display aggressive behavior or to the other end, may exhibit total regression or withdrawal from normal activities. Emotional support and counseling to children of this age group is of particular importance and should comprise of: Encourage the child to drawing pictures and write letters so that his/her internal fears get a way out. Children should not be snubbed in their role playing about life and death rather should be corrected in making their concepts right. Children should be given a consistent reply to their repeated queries about the deceased or else they will get more confused. Inappropriate behavior by the grieving child should not go unnoticed. The same should be pointed out in appropriate manner so that the child does not adopt that on permanent basis.

Children should be involved in physical activities like sports or excursions to keep them busy and physically exhausted, which will help them in having a good sleep at night. Give an extra hand in helping the child in school work so that the child is not bogged down in academic problems. The grieving child's friends may be educated through their parents in how to deal with him/her in coping through this temporary phase of life. The children in teens have their cognitive processes developed as those of adults.

Their pain tends to express itself through physical symptoms, depression, and anger. They will try to act like adults and may feel the need to be strong so they can care for the rest of the family. They are more vulnerable to grief since they have a little more freedom of action and to their imaginations, they might possess powers to change the world. They may exhibit reckless behavior with their own lives to prove that they are not afraid of death. They may drive at high speeds or abuse drugs or alcohol or increase sexual activity (Crick, 2003).

The problem with children of this age group is that they are reluctant to accept advises or counseling and consider themselves to be competent enough to handle their own issues. They should not be asked to write letters or draw pictures since they have passed through that age and have feelings of adults (Anderson, 1986). They would however require emotional support to get over with their grief through a variety of other ways. Community bereavement support groups often provide the sort of forum these children require. Here they discover that they are not alone and that their feelings are normal.

Teenagers generally do not like anything to be imposed on them. Through listening to other children, they will learn valuable coping ideas which they can implement at their own choice (McMahan, 1995). These children can also be assisted in overcoming grief by providing them appropriate literature related to overcoming the grief. Conclusion Children generally do not understand death until they are three or four years old, but they still feel the

loss of someone close if they pass away. Even in infancy it is clear that children can feel the distress of loss.

It is however worth mentioning that children recover from grieving process much quicker than adults but still need to be reassured constantly if they have lost someone very close such as a parent. Strong emotional support with appropriate counseling according to the age group of the child goes a long way in helping the child in overcoming the emotion of grief. The normal grief is not that serious as the complicated one and will usually be over in less than six months time period. This paper has described various strategies in helping a child in coping with the normal grief. But if there is any doubt about the way that a child is grieving then professional help should be sought. References Anderson, Elliot. (1986). Helping Children in Coping with Grief.

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