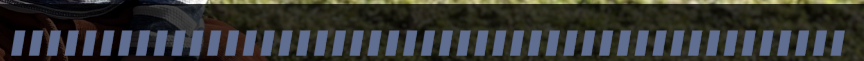




Helping Our Children through Grief & Loss During Covid-19

Leticia Enriquez, LCSW

Sonia Godoy, MSW



Introduction

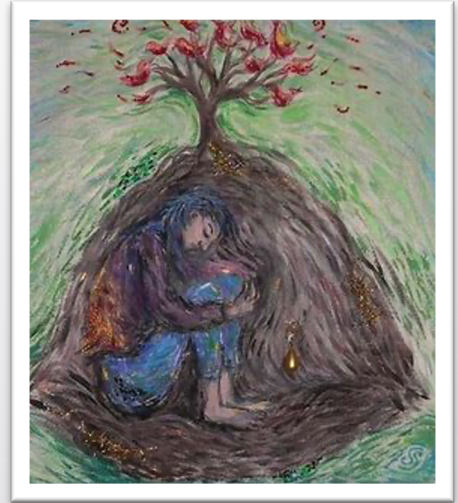


Outline

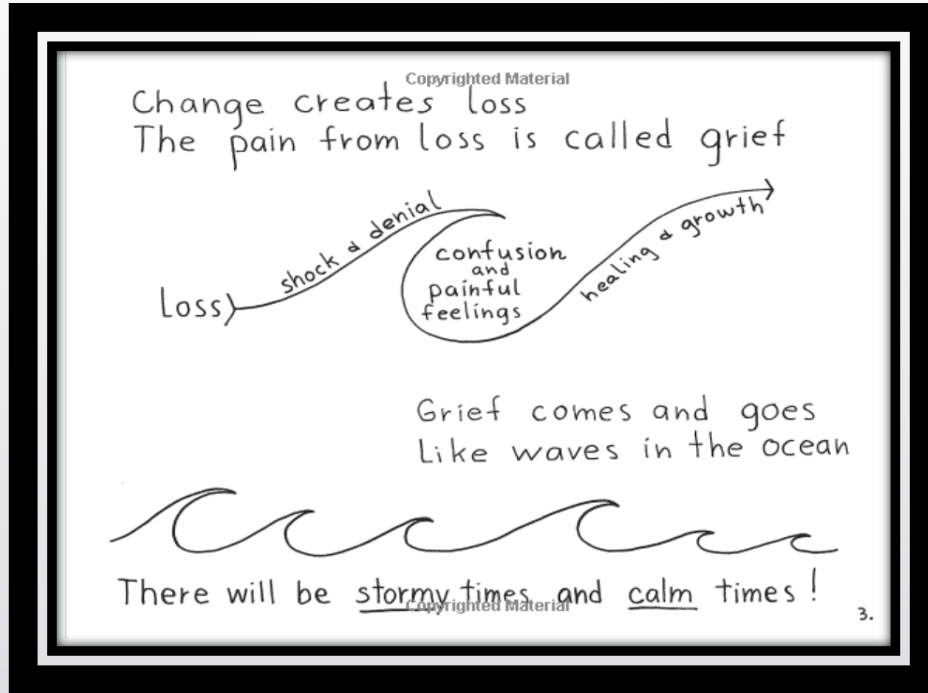
1. Defining Grief & Normalizing Grief
2. Talking to Children About Death & Loss
3. Unique Challenges to Grief During Covid-19
4. Common Reactions and Red Flags
5. Strategies to Support Grieving Children
6. Resources

What is grief?

- Grief is our emotional response to loss.
- It is a **normal** and **natural** response after losing someone or something important.




Grief Is A Response To All Loss, Not Just Death



From *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegaard

How to Talk to Children about Death

- 
- Don't pretend everything is OK.
 - Speak gently but frankly and directly to children.
 - Use the word "dead" or "died."
 - Present the facts about what happens to the physical body, as well as the religious beliefs held by your family.
 - Don't tell children that they should not be worried or minimize their concerns.

How to Talk to Children About Death



Grief and Covid-19

The following factors may intensify the stress related to loss:

- Suddenness of a death (Eisma et al., 2020)
- Not being able to visit a dying family member before they die (Mayland et al., 2020)
- Limited direct and in-person support (Wallace et al., 2020)
- Absence of traditional grieving practices and rituals (Eisma et al., 2020)
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- Disruption and stress occurring in other aspects of life (e.g. separation from school, religious institutions, extracurricular engagement) (Morris et al., 2020)
- Frequent exposure to reminders of the pandemic (e.g. media coverage) (Whaley et al., 2017)

AGES	LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING	REACTIVE BEHAVIORS	NEEDS
2 AND UNDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can sense that something is different at home. • Does not yet understand what death is. • Probably won't remember the person who died. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fussiness • Clinging to adults • Regressive behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-verbal care (such as hugging, rocking) • Stable routine
2 – 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees death as temporary – believes person will return. Don't fear death, but fear separation. • Usually can't comprehend the concepts of heaven, afterlife or soul. • Feels sadness, but often periods of grief are interspersed with normal playing behavior. • Substitutes attachment from the deceased person to another person. • May not remember the person who died. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regression (bed-wetting, thumb-sucking) • Fear of separation • Nightmares • Aggression • Non-compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable daily routine • Structure • Honesty, use the words "dead" and "died" honestly but simply • Love • Reassurance • To be heard, so listen
6 – 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to understand that death is permanent. • Develops fear of death and of others dying. • May feel guilt and blame self for death; see it as punishment for bad behavior. • Magical thinking; may see self as cause of death. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief ebbs and flows • Compulsive caregiving • Aggression • Possessiveness (e.g., of remaining parent) • Regression • Somatic complaints • School phobia • Exaggerated fears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to express their feelings (art, writing, etc.) • Concrete answers to questions • Validation of feelings • Love • Reassurance that they are not to blame • To be heard, so listen
10 – 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a realistic view of death and its permanence. • Asks specific questions about death, the body, etc. Interested in the gory details. • Concerned with practical questions. (Who will take care of me? How will my family's lifestyle change? Etc.) • Identifies strongly with deceased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upset by the disruption in their lives • Blame others for the loss • Separation anxiety, some denial and/or guilt • Difficulty concentrating • Decline in school performance • Want to be "fixers" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission and outlets to express feelings, including anger, relief, sadness, etc. • Validation of feelings • Offers of support and assistance and to know who can help them to be heard, so listen, listen,


Common Reactions



Warning Signs:

- Saying that he/she wants to die
- Threatening to hurt or hurting self or someone else
- Damaging property
- Self medicating with drugs or alcohol
- Socially withdrawing
- Constant sadness with little or no break in it
- Extreme anxiety

Strategies to Support Grieving Children

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- You know strategies that have helped in the past to decrease your children's distress- try them now.
 - Keep family routines as intact as possible (mealtime, bedtime, etc.)
 - Reading or hobbies that promote healthy distractions.
 - Talking to others, journaling, blogging, art, music to promote expressions of feelings.
 - Exercise, yoga (Inner Explorer)
 - Relaxation techniques, mindfulness.
 - Help children identify steps they can take personally to protect their own health and to help others.

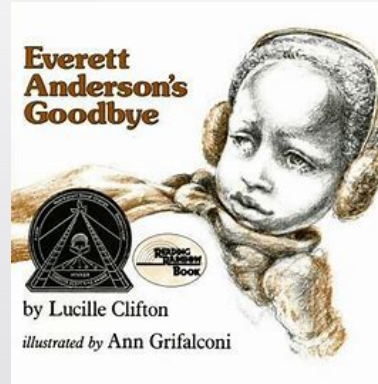
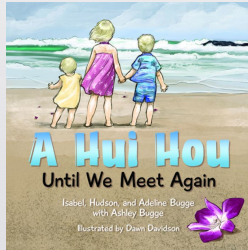
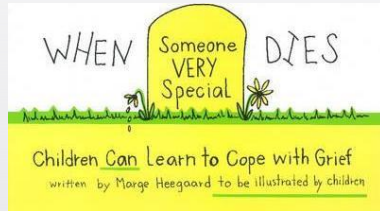


A Word on Self-Care

In times of grief, children tune into how their parents/caregivers manage grief and take cues from their actions (The Dougy Centre, n.d.; Whaley et al., 2017).



Resources



Bibliotherapy:

- Always in My Heart, age 4 and Up
- I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas, age 4 Up
- When Someone Very Special Dies by Marge Heegaard, age 8 Up
- Everett Anderson's Goodbye by Lucille Clifton, age 5-8
- A Hui Hou, Until We Meet Again, age 5-8

Resources

[Grief Resources for Kids | Dougy Center](#)

[GoodGrief.org/resources](#)

Create a Memory Box

All you need to do is find some sort of box (or another container) from around the house, have them decorate it, and then suggest that they fill it with objects that give them good memories of the person they lost. This could be anything from drawings, to cards, to photos, to a special present they received from the deceased.





The Elizabeth Hospice

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Questions