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Understanding Childhood Traumatic Loss Through the Lens of Multidimensional Grief Theory

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Understanding Childhood Traumatic Loss Through the Lens of Multidimensional Grief Theory



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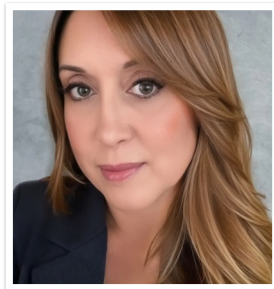
This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, U.S. Department of Defense under Award Number 2019-48770-30366.

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Today's Presenter



Julie B. Kaplow (*she/her/hers*)

PhD, ABPP

Executive Director, Trauma and Grief Centers at The Hackett Center for Mental Health and Children's Hospital New Orleans

Executive Vice President, Trauma and Grief Programs and Policy, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Professor of Psychiatry, Tulane University School of Medicine

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Acknowledgement

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The presenter has no relationships or conflicts of interest to report.

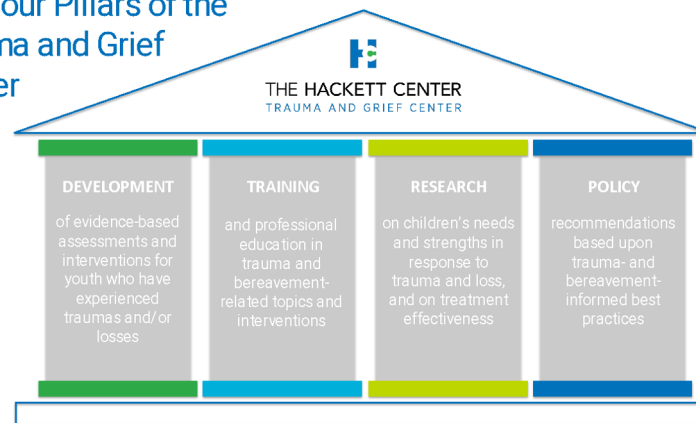
Learning Objectives

- Describe multidimensional grief theory and the interpersonal psychological theory of suicide
- Identify the three dimensions of grief
- Understand specific bereavement-related challenges among youth exposed to suicide death
- Identify the differences between traumatic stress reactions, grief reactions, trauma reminders, and loss reminders

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The Four Pillars of the Trauma and Grief Center



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Lucine Center for Trauma and Grief


Lucine Center
for trauma and grief

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You are not alone.

A traumatic event or loss can make a child, teen, or young adult feel like they're surrounded by darkness. Let us help light the way toward hope and healing.

Begin your journey →

<http://lucinecenter.com> 

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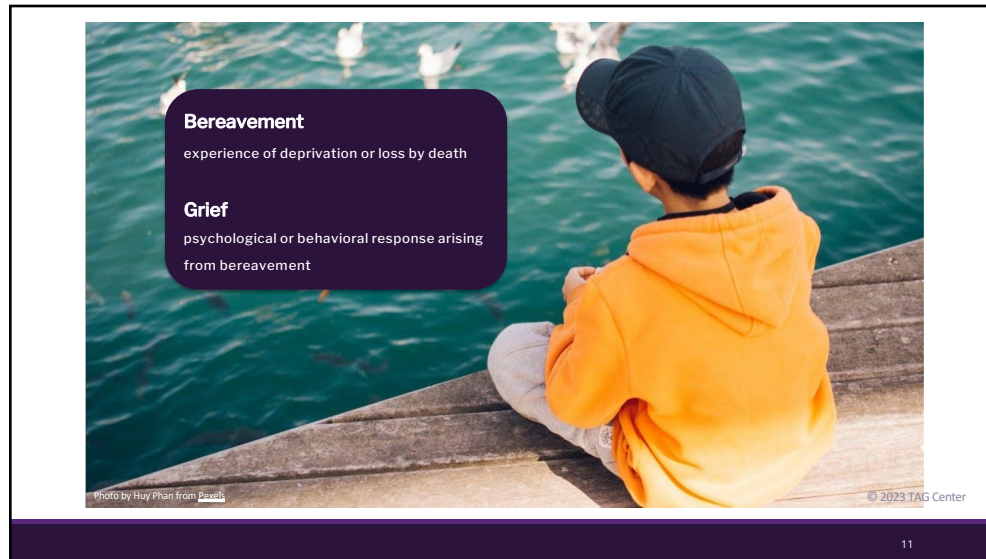
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Defining Childhood Grief

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Bereavement
experience of deprivation or loss by death





Grief
psychological or behavioral response arising from bereavement

Photo by Huy Phan from Pexels © 2023 TAG Center

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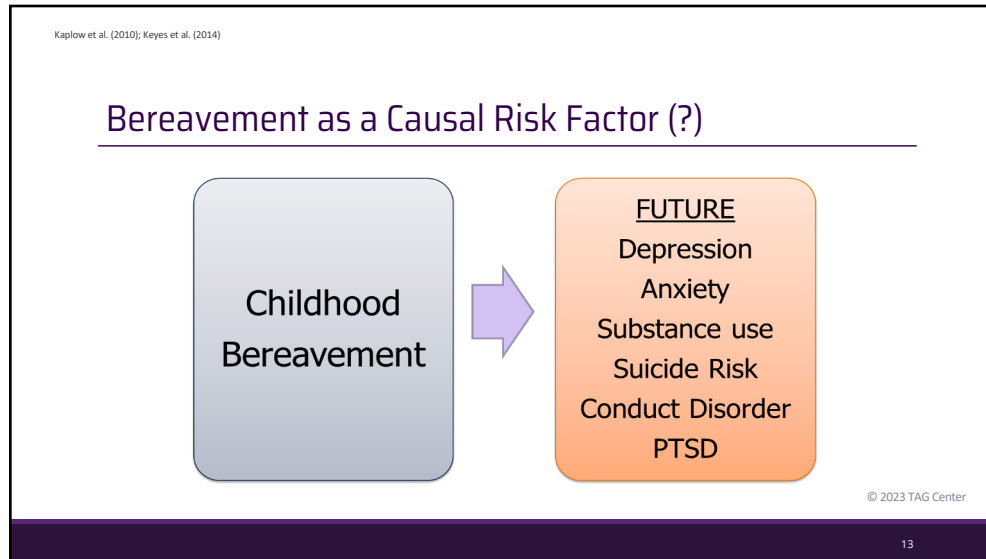
Why Focus on Bereavement?

 <p>Most frequently reported type of trauma in clinic-referred youth <i>(Pynoos et al., 2014)</i></p>	 <p>Most common form of trauma worldwide <i>(Burns et al., 2020)</i></p>	 <p>Most distressing form of trauma among adults and youth in the general population <i>(Breslau et al., 2004; Kaplow, Saunders, Angold, & Costello, 2010)</i></p>	 <p>Strongest predictor of poor school outcomes above and beyond any other form of trauma <i>(Oosterhoff, Kaplow, & Layne, 2018)</i></p>
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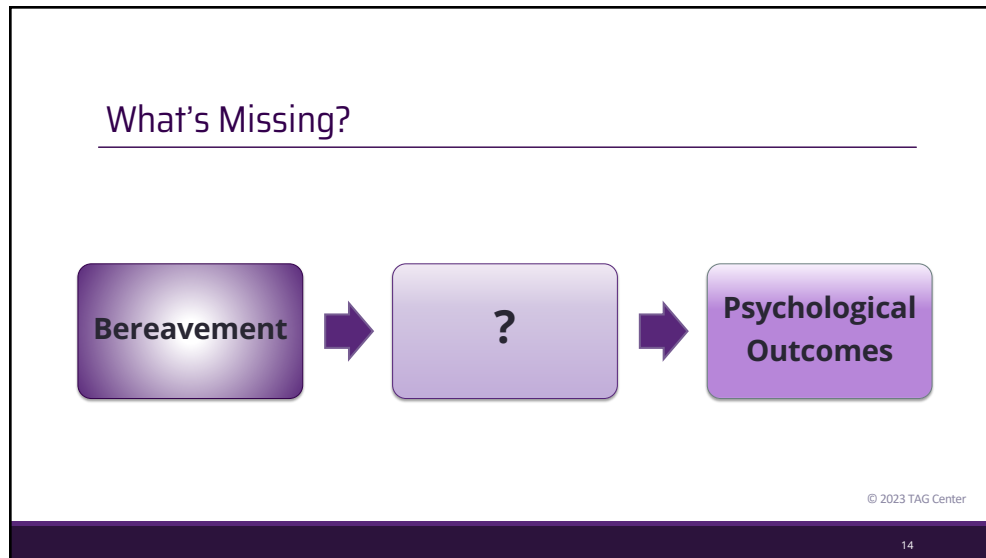
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Children's grief reactions (not simply bereavement) play an important role in future psychological functioning.

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Important Facts About Grief

- Most bereaved children will go on to lead healthy, happy, productive lives.
- There is no "right" or "wrong" way to grieve.
- There is no set timeline for grief.
- Grief is not a "problem" to be fixed. It is a natural part of life and a reflection of the love we have for the person who died.

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How Do Children Typically Grieve?

- “Typical” grief reactions are hard to define
- Very few large studies of bereaved children...
even fewer studies of bereaved children followed over time



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How Do Children Typically Grieve?

Grief reactions influenced by:

- Developmental level
- Previous life experiences
- Relationship to deceased
- Culture
- Religious/spiritual beliefs
- Family
- Social environment
- Cause of death



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What Does Death Mean to Preschoolers?

Toddlers/Preschoolers

(2-5-year-olds)

- Experience sense of “gone-ness”
- Often believe that death is reversible
- Struggle with body’s lack of functioning
- Play out aspects of death



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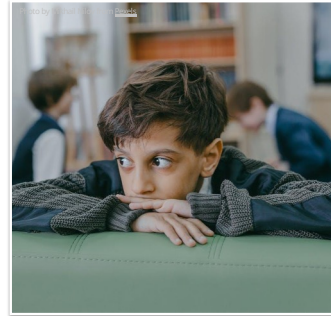
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What Does Death Mean to School-Aged Children?

School-Age Children

(6-9-year-olds)

- Struggle with concepts of body vs. soul
- See death as something tangible or physical
- Worry about surviving caregivers



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What Does Death Mean to Older School-Aged Children?

Older School-Age Children

(10-12-year-olds)

- Better able to grasp concept of body vs. spirit
- May believe that their own actions caused the death
- More realistic about permanency of death, which is why we start to see more psychological distress in this age group



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What Does Death Mean to Adolescents?

Adolescents

(13-18-year-olds)

- Struggle with larger life questions (why me?)
- May test own mortality with risk-taking behaviors
- More likely to develop psychiatric symptoms given understanding of death
- Greater focus on how death will affect own future



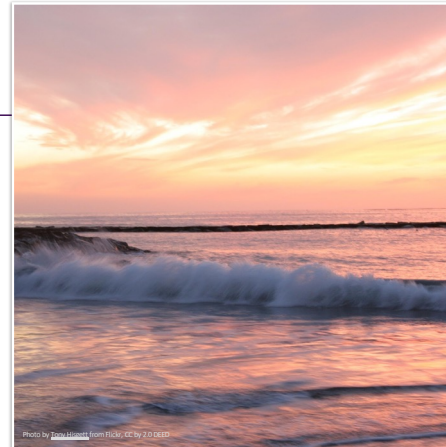
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Typical Grief Reactions

- Can be very intense (pining, yearning, sadness, anger or protest over the loss).
- Are often at least temporarily associated with decreased functioning.
- Typically transition from pain to more pleasant reminiscing over time.



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Unhelpful/Maladaptive Grief Reactions

- More likely to occur under traumatic circumstances (just beginning to learn what “traumatic” means).
- Current literature has referred to different forms of maladaptive grief as “complicated grief,” “prolonged grief,” or “childhood traumatic grief” although they are quite different.
- Approximately 10–25% of bereaved children are at risk for maladaptive grief (studies conducted primarily with Caucasian middle-class samples).
- Little is known about specific symptoms, age-related manifestations, and course.

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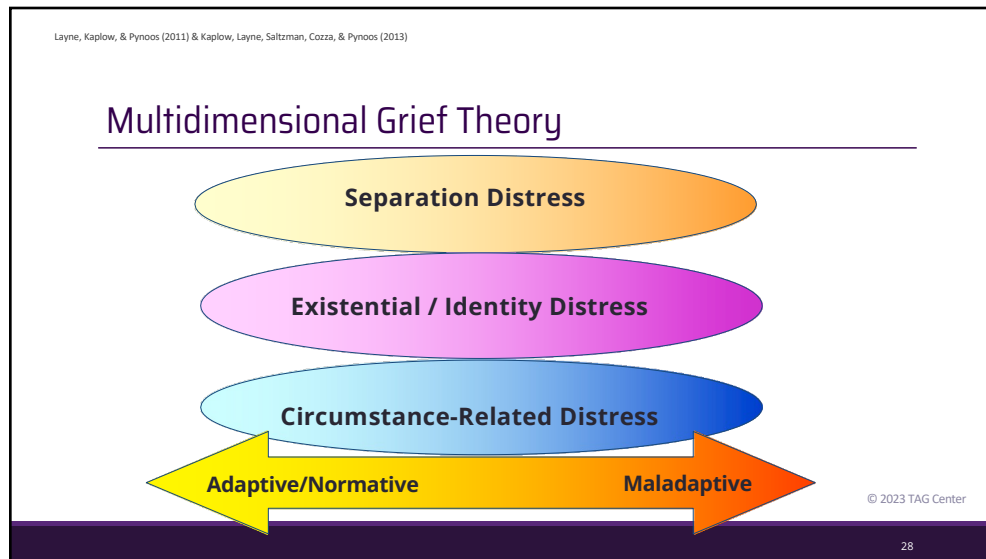
Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

- New diagnosis in DSM-5
- To diagnose a child (under the age of 18), the death had to have occurred at least 6 months ago, symptoms have to be present for at least a month and be intense enough to cause impairment
- Approximately 10-20% of bereaved youth develop PGD, but most studies have been limited with regard to diversity
- Informed by Multidimensional Grief Theory

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- ## Facing the Challenge of...
- Separation Distress
 - Existential Distress
 - Circumstance-Related Distress
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A Multidimensional Framework is Important Because...

Distinct dimensions of grief may:

- Be more prominent at certain developmental stages
- May not be present in all bereaved populations
- Require different treatment components (i.e., different therapeutic activities to address different grief domains)

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Boss (1999)

Grief in the Context of Ambiguous Loss

Ambiguous loss differs from ordinary loss in that...

- No verification of death (e.g., person is missing)
- No certainty that the person will come back
- No guarantee things will return to the way they used to be

Two types of ambiguous loss:

- Loved one is physically missing
- Loved one is psychologically absent (i.e., emotionally or cognitively missing)

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Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman, et al. (2013)

Unique Experiences of Grief and Loss Among Military Youth

Experiences of both types of ambiguous loss:

Loved one is physically missing

Loved one is deployed; has little to no contact with family.

Body is not found.

No certainty of reunification.

Loved one is psychologically/emotionally absent

Loved ones may be emotionally unavailable upon return due to PTSD and/or grief.

No certainty that things will "return to normal."



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Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman, et al. (2013)

Grief Reactions in Response to Ambiguous Loss: Multidimensional Grief Theory

Separation Distress: Preoccupation with the person's absence; yearning and longing

- Loneliness, fantasies of reunification, anger, protest, uncertainty
- "When is Dad coming back? When can I see him again?"

Existential Distress: Struggle with one's identity or feeling lost without the person

- Feeling different from others; pessimistic outlook on life; identity crisis
- "No one understands what this is like. I feel like I don't really know who I am anymore."

Circumstance-Related Distress: Preoccupation with the experience of deployment or what made the person go missing

- Unable to move forward due to uncertainty of the circumstances; anger; revenge fantasies
- "I feel like he's just going to walk through the door."

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Risk Factors for Childhood Maladaptive Grief

- Previous traumas
- Circumstances of the death
- Prior mental health problems (depression and/or anxiety)
- Avoidant coping strategies
- Impaired functioning of surviving parent
- Lack of social support
- Frequent exposure to trauma/loss reminders
- Secondary problems following death

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Links Between Bereavement and Suicide Risk

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Suicide: A Public Health Concern

- ❖ *Second leading cause of death among adolescents (CDC, 2019).
- ❖ *18% of high school students report seriously considering suicide (Kann et al., 2016).
- ❖ *9% report an actual suicide attempt in the last year (Kann et al., 2016).
- ❖ *Adverse life events are linked to suicide risk:
 - Physical abuse
 - Sexual abuse
 - Family violence
 - Discrimination
 - Natural disasters
 - Bereavement

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 - Natural disasters
 - **Bereavement**

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Suicide Ideation and Reunification Fantasies

Suicide Ideation and Guilt

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Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide in the Context of Bereavement

Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTS: Joiner, 2005)

- Thwarted belongingness – sense of loneliness and perceived lack of support.
- Perceived burdensomeness – one has become a drain on the resources of others.

Thwarted belongingness (Hill et al., 2019)

- “Nobody understands me. No one knows what this is like.”
- “People think I’m weird because I don’t have a mom anymore.”
- “Anyone I get close to dies – I shouldn’t get close to anyone anymore.”

Perceived burdensomeness (Hill et al., 2019)

- “Mom starts to cry every time I mention how much I miss Dad.”
- “If I had been better behaved in school, Mom wouldn’t have been so stressed and had a heart attack.”

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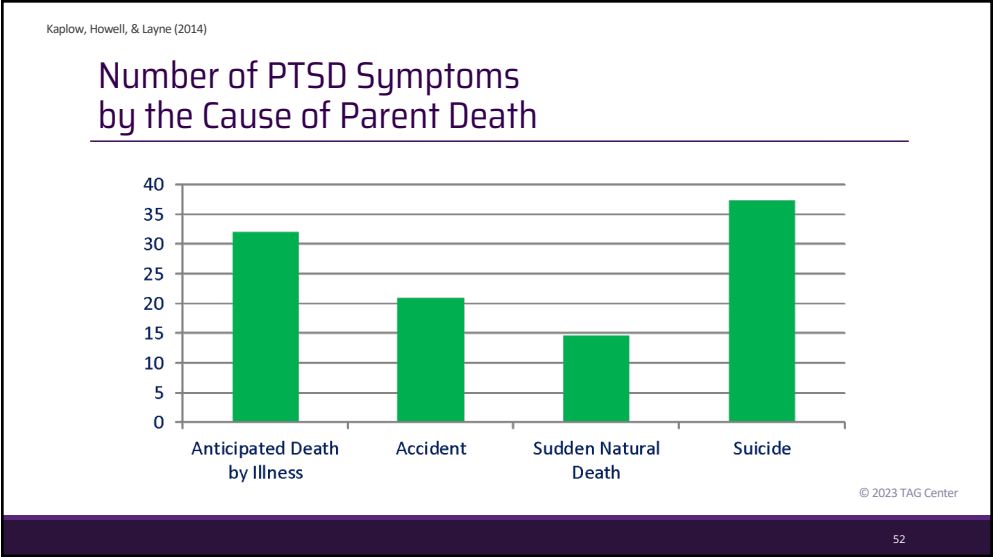
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Defining Traumatic Bereavement

And Matching Circumstances of Death to Traumatic Stress Reactions

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Kaplow, Saunders, Angold, & Costello (2010)

Consequences of Untreated Maladaptive Grief

- Relationship problems
- Substance abuse
- Police involvement (criminal behavior)
- School drop-out, poor school grades
- Violence (revenge)
- Depression and suicidal thoughts/behaviors

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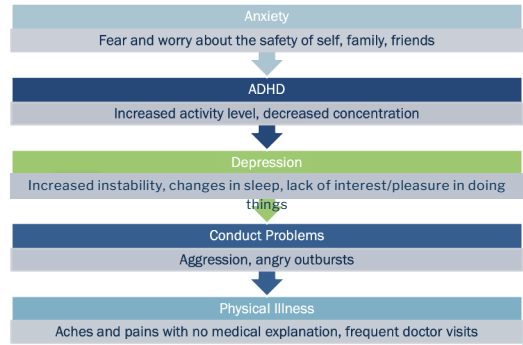
Distinguishing PTSD from Grief: A Difference That Makes a Difference

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Traumatic Stress Reactions Can Look Like...



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~~What's *WRONG* with that child?~~

What HAPPENED
to that child?

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Layne, Warren, et al. (2006)

Trauma vs. Loss Reminders

Trauma Reminders	Loss Reminders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images, sounds, smells, people, situations that remind child of the traumatic event • Often lead to PTSD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images, sounds, smells, people, situations that remind child of the absence of the person • Often lead to grief reactions

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Saltzman, Layne, Pynoos, Olafson, Kaplow, & Boat (2017)

Trauma and Grief Component Therapy

Module I	Module II	Module III	Module IV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Cohesion • Psycho-Education • Basic Coping Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resuming Developmental Progression • Moving Forward

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Grassetti et al. (2015); Layne et al. (2001; 2008); Saltzman et al. (2006)

Evidence of TGCT's Effectiveness

Results of effectiveness studies showed:

- Reductions in PTSD, depression, and unhelpful grief reactions
- Improved school behavior including...
 - Enhanced classroom rule compliance
 - Enhanced positive peer relationships
 - Enhanced school performance
 - Increased school interest
 - Decreased school anxiety/withdrawal
 - Decreased violence

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Evidence-Based Practice Elements for Grieving Youth

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Evidence-Based Practice Elements: Supporting Bereaved Youth

Review of studies examining effectiveness of interventions for bereaved youth (Kaplow, Layne, & Pynoos, 2019)

Group-Based Treatments

- Family Bereavement Program (Sandler et al., 2013)
- Grief and Trauma Intervention (Salloum, 2008)
- Trauma and Grief Component Therapy (Saltzman et al., 2017)

Individual Treatments

- Grief-Help (Boelen et al., 2006)
- TF-CBT for Childhood Traumatic Grief (Cohen et al., 2017)
- Multidimensional Grief Therapy (Hill et al., 2019; Kaplow et al., 2023)

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Core Components of Grief Interventions

1. Grief Psychoeducation
2. Emotion Identification/Regulation
3. Cognitive Coping/Restructuring
4. Grief and/or Trauma Processing
5. Memorializing/Continuing Bonds
6. Meaning-Making/Legacy Building
7. Parental Grief Facilitation/Positive Parenting
8. Planning for the Future

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1. Grief Psychoeducation

There is no “right or wrong way” to grieve

- Different family members grieve in different ways
- May involve identification and discussion of trauma/loss reminders
- Useful to mention the “adaptive” aspects of grief

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2. Emotion Identification/ Regulation

3. Cognitive Coping/ Restructuring

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4. Trauma Processing

Trauma processing focuses on the death event itself:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why

Designed to alleviate PTSS and some forms of circumstance-related distress

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4. Grief Processing

My Grief Story

Kaplow, Layne, Pynoos & Saltzman (2023)

- Chapter 1: All About ____ (SD)
- Chapter 2: What I Miss the Most (SD)
- Chapter 3: How I Stay Connected (SD)
- Chapter 4: How ____ Died (CRD)
- Chapter 5: Where Are They Now? (SD, EX)
- Chapter 6: How Things Have Changed (EX)
- Chapter 7: Making Meaning of the Death (EX)
- Chapter 8: My Life Now and My Life in the Future (EX)

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5. Memorializing/Continuing Bonds

6. Meaning Making/ Legacy Building

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7. Parental Grief Facilitation

- “Positive parenting” (routines, positive reinforcement, active listening) associated with decreased distress in bereaved youth (Ayers et al., 2014; Sandler et al., 2013)
- Not so much about what you **say**, but what you **do**.
- Specific caregiver behaviors associated with decreased maladaptive grief and depression in children (Shapiro et al., 2014):
 - Physical affection, hugs
 - Smiling
 - Consistent eye contact
 - Being “present”

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Kaplow & Layne (2012)

Grief Facilitation Inventory

Child and caregiver report of caregiver's behaviors theorized to help or hinder child's adaptive grief reactions.

Items include:

- Frequency of memorializing activities
- Frequency of communication about the death
- Frequency of communication about the deceased person
- Sharing of spiritual beliefs
- Parental response to child's emotions
- Parental expression of his/her own emotions

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Alvis et al. (2020)

Validation of the Grief Facilitation Inventory

Exploratory factor analysis identified four factors:

Ongoing Connection

- My caregiver tells me about good things I have in common with my.

Existential Continuity/Support

- My caregiver lets me know that I can still have a good life even though my ____ has died.

Caregiver Grief Expression

- My caregiver tells me how he/she is feeling about my ____'s death.

Grief Inhibition/Avoidance

- My caregiver tells me not to talk about how my ____ died with people outside of my family.

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Supporting Bereaved Youth

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When to Seek Support



Behaviors interfere with functioning in any major life domain (school, home, with peers)

Extreme signs of depression (tearful, not able to get out of bed in the morning)

Any gesture related to self-harm or mention of suicidal or homicidal ideation

Signs of possible PTSD

When in doubt, refer out!

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The power of parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic: helping children cope with the impending death of a loved one

The power of parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic: addressing fears and feelings from prior losses

The power of parenting during the covid-19 pandemic: mourning the death of a loved one

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Military OneSource - Support After Loss

Military OneSource - Support After Loss

For survivors who have lost their service member, there are specially designed programs and services to help you cope.

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty-assistance/survivor-support/>

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For More Information

Julie Kaplow, PhD, ABPP
 Executive Director, TAG Center
jkaplow@mmhpi.org

Marisa Nowitz, MSW, LCSW-S
 Senior Director, School and Community
 Engagement
mnowitz@mmhpi.org

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- The American Association for Family and Consumer Sciences
- Certificates of Attendance

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Questions?

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Upcoming Webinar



Addressing Maladaptive Grief Reactions Among Youth

This session describes assessment and interventions for youth who have experienced traumatic loss. Suggestions are provided for how to implement these practices with military families. **Continuing education credits are available!**



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