

TRAUMA AND GRIEF EFFECTS AND REACTIONS

Trauma and grief are multifaceted concepts with complex origins and manifestations. The varying types and degrees of trauma-related effects require individualized strengths-based and adaptive processes and interventions on the part of service providers and professionals. Community and peer supports are pivotal in improving well-being and reducing isolation and other risk factors.



Developmental Perspectives on Grief

3 - 5 Years Old – Early Childhood

Ways in which grief can manifest	Tips to help children cope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They generally struggle to understand the concept that the parent's body no longer functions and that their parent will not return • Children may have intense separation anxiety when apart from primary caregiver • They tend to become overwhelmed when exposed to others' reactions of sadness and grief • Children may ask repetitious questions about their parent's whereabouts in the first few weeks-months after their parent's death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will express their thoughts and feelings most clearly through play, fantasy and drawing • Continue to be a consistent and predictable presence in the child's life • Encourage reminiscing about the parent who has died

6 - 8 Years Old – Middle Childhood

Ways in which grief can manifest	Tips to help children cope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children can immediately understand the finality of parent's death and are appropriately sad and upset when informed • They tend to bring up joyous memories of their deceased parent and talk openly about speaking with the parent who died • Moments of grief (sadness, anger, dejection) are generally brief • Tend to exhibit more physical symptoms than other age groups • May exhibit fearfulness, sleeping problems, and separation anxiety • Children in this age group may speak openly and explicitly about wanting to die so they can be with or visit their parent after death <p><i>Note: These thoughts are generally transient and are not accompanied by suicidal intent. If these thoughts persist or become rigid or inflexible, a professional evaluation is recommended.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children remain exclusively dependent on parental support - continue to be a consistent and predictable presence in the child's life • Forewarning the child about separation (going to school, time with babysitter) can lessen intensity of separation anxiety • Accept the openness of discussions around difficult topics • School can take on a different level of importance in the lives of children; teachers or select students may become very important to them

9 - 11 Years Old – Pre-Adolescent

Ways in which grief can manifest	Tips to help children cope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children may desire factual information about parent's death to gain some sense of control by comprehending the event • Children may avoid their own and other's strong emotions associated with grief and loss • Some will talk openly about their feelings – but only briefly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children may treasure clothing or items belonging to the parent for comfort or opportunities to reminisce • They enjoy looking at pictures during healthy and happy moments of their parent's life • They may respond well to more formal opportunities to express their grief

12 - 14 Years Old – Early Adolescents

Ways in which grief can manifest	Tips to help children cope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually characterized by avoidance of emotional expression (except anger and disdain); may also avoid information about illness • May speak easily about dreams of parent or strong sense of parent's presence • May have a strong desire to wear clothes and have possessions of parent who died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow appropriate emotional and physical withdrawal, however monitor the emerging expressions of independence • Encourage interactions with other adults for some help and supports previously provided by deceased parent

15 - 17 Years Old – Adolescents and Young Adults

Ways in which grief can manifest	Tips to help children cope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mourning is similar to adults, but not as long in duration • Usually experience intense sadness, longing, despair, hopelessness and helplessness which often times interferes with activities like school, sports, and after school activities • Some may exhibit behaviors such as bouts of anger, arguments with parents or caregivers, testing limits, and demanding time away from home to be with friends/boyfriends/girlfriends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not underestimate the intensity of their experience and impact on their functioning • Communicate with teachers and other adults to mitigate overly critical responses • Encourage them to turn to trusted friends, bereavement groups, or individual counseling

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Types of Trauma

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Intergenerational Trauma	Vicarious Trauma	Trauma Triggers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May result from direct exposure to a traumatic event	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal and collective trauma experiences can be transmitted generationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second-hand exposure; common among caregivers/responders working with those directly exposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reminders that may result in hyperarousal, avoidance, etc.

Interventions for Effects of Trauma

Fear/Loss of Safety	Dissociation	Hyperarousal	Isolation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish safe environment; individual and group agreements, inclusion, non-judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindfulness/Body awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying triggers; individual and group regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connecting with others with similar experiences; normalizing and foundation for healing

Types of Grief

Traumatic Loss	Complicated Grief	Ambiguous Loss	Varied Timelines & Developmental Perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sudden loss often of violent or graphic nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prolonged or complex grieving process associated with traumatic and sudden loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often the result of lack of closure that delays the grieving process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone metabolizes grief differently; children's responses change with development

Interventions for Grief Reactions

Longing/Yearning	Withdrawal	Depression	Anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find positive ways to incorporate memories of loved ones into one's life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishing trusted social supports; connecting with common bonds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address whether this is specific to grief and if further intervention is needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify/address fears of loss/abandonment, establish safe environment