



Implications of Traumatic Grief on School-Aged Children

LOSS, GRIEF AND MOURNING:

the physical, behavioral, cognitive and emotional experience of and reactions to the loss, the grief process, as well as rituals and practices surrounding grief (Meagher & Balk, 2017)

TRAUMATIC DEATH:

a death that occurs in a manner that is unanticipated, shocking, or violent; may be inflicted, self-inflicted or unintentional (Meagher & Balk, 2017)

TRAUMATIC GRIEF:

The development of trauma symptoms resulting from a person's experience of death that may interfere with typical grief responses (Cohen, 2016)



ACCORDING TO THE CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT ESTIMATION MODEL (CBEM, 2023), 1 IN 11 CHILDREN IN ARIZONA WILL EXPERIENCE THE DEATH OF A PARENT OR SIBLING BY AGE 18. BEREAVED CHILDREN ARE AT AN INCREASED RISK OF:

GRIEF-RELATED ADVERSITY ISSUES AT HOME, FINANCIAL STRAIN, DEATH OF AN IMPORTANT FIGURE, MOVE/LOSS OF COMMUNITY

DISRUPTED DEVELOPMENT MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS, RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULTIES, ACADEMIC PROBLEMS, REDUCED RESILIENCE/SELF ESTEEM, EARLY MORTALITY

HOW GRIEF SHOWS UP IN THE SCHOOL SETTING:

- CHANGES IN PLAY
- POOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE
- DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING
- SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL
- AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
- FIGHTING, SCREAMING, ARGUING
- CHANGES IN PEER GROUPS
- DIFFICULTIES WITH TRANSITIONS



IMPORTANT GRIEF CARE PROTECTIVE FACTORS INCLUDE (CBEM, 2023):

1. Caring Community
2. Positive Role Models
3. Healthy Coping Skills
4. Peer Support
5. Encouraging Educators

HOW CAN WE HELP?

ACTIVITIES THAT ARE THERAPEUTIC, BUT NOT THERAPY:

TALK ABOUT & REMEMBER THE PERSON WHO DIED
PLAY/ROLE PLAY

CREATIVE WRITING

SPORTS

ART

SHARE PHOTOS

MEMORY BOX

COLLAGE

SCRAPBOOKING

PAPER LANTERNS

CLAY SCULPTURING

GOODBYE LETTER

DRAWING OF GRIEF/ FAMILY GRIEF

INSTRUMENTS

READINGS

NATURE

JEWELRY

IDENTIFY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORTS

REMEMBER ANNIVERSARIES, BIRTHDAYS & HOLIDAYS





DO'S

TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

ENCOURAGE HONEST DISCUSSION

LISTEN DEEPLY

CHECK IN REGULARLY

OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR RITUAL

ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENCES IN GRIEF RESPONSES

ALLOW THE PAIN TO EXIST

VALIDATE

DONT'S

SEARCH FOR A SILVER LINING

TRY TO "FIX" IT

PUSH OR ENCOURAGE UNNATURAL FEELINGS

OFFER PLATITUDES-

"EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON"

"IT WAS GOD'S PLAN"

"IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON"

WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

1. Persistent anxiety that manifests as excessive codependency / attachment issues or school phobia
2. Prolonged somatic complaints (headaches/stomach aches)
3. Eating disorders (marked change in eating habits)
4. Persistent difficulty talking about the dead person
5. Marked social withdrawal that persists
6. School difficulties or serious academic reversals
7. Persistent self-blame or guilt
8. Self destructive/acting out behaviors
9. Expression of the desire to die
10. Parent relies on child for emotional support
11. Trauma symptoms: avoidance, intrusive thoughts/emotions, hyperarousal, and negative beliefs about self in relationship to the trauma
12. Persistent aggressive, high risk or dangerous behavior
13. Unwillingness to engage with others socially to any extent
14. Intense fear of new experiences that influences their ability to engage with activities of daily living
15. Child is a danger to themselves/others
16. Child describes extensive neglect that has been occurring since the death

RESOURCES

BOOKS

- **The Empty Place: Roberta Temes, Ph. D**
- **Help Me Say Goodbye : Activities for Helping Kids Cope**
- **When a Special Person Dies- Janis Silverman**
- **A Rainbow of Hope: Stories and Activities to Help Children Cope with Grief & Loss- Linda Hagler, M.Ed.**
- **After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids by The Dougy Center**
- **Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children- Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen**
- **What Color is Death, Daddy? The Guide to Helping Children Grieve**
- **The Colors of Love and Loss- Dr. Joanne Cacciatore**

Community Resources

- **New Song (Hospice of the Valley)**
- **Billy's Place**
- **Stepping Stones of Hope**
- **The Compassionate Friends**
- **Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families- Arizona State University**

Local Therapists

- **Tahirih Herrera, LCSW**
- **Bloom Counseling**
- **Center for Compassion: Sydney Gonzales, LMSW, Kristina Allen, LMSW, Janel Rainer, LMSW**

GREATER AT LARGE SERVICES

- **Judy's House**
- **National Alliance for Children's Grief**
- **Center for Loss & Life Transitions**
- **Portland Institute for Loss & Transitions**
- **MISS Foundation**
- **bereavedparenting.org**

REFERENCES

Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM). Judi's House. (2023, May 17). <https://judishouse.org/research-tools/cbem/>

Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A. P., & Deblinger, E. (2016). Treating trauma and traumatic grief in children and adolescents. Guilford Publications.

Meagher, D. K., & Balk, D. E. (2017). Handbook of Thanatology: The essential body of knowledge for the study of death, dying, and bereavement. Routledge.

