



February 9, 2024

Weaving adoption Competency into your practice session 5 Grief:

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Grief: The response to the loss of something deemed important.
Grief is love with no place to go.

Resource:

- The 3-5-7 Model A practice Approach to Permanence by Darla L Henry MD, MSW
- Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon
- The Seven Core Issues Workbook for Parents of Traumatized Children and Teens by Allison Davis Mazon and Sharon Kaplan Roszia

Grief: Loss, wheal, rejection, shame/guilt, grief

- Grief: This is the response to the loss of something deemed important- grief is love with no place to go.
- Grief is hard but important.
- Grief is a personal and highly individualized experience. The grief cycle is predictably unpredictable.
- Grief shows up in Cognitive & Physical Symptoms. What have you seen in your practice?
- Tummy aches, headaches
- Staring spells
- Clinginess to home or safe adults, A sense of being 'unanchored,' lost, bouncing between places and people.
- Lack of hygiene makes me unable to take care of myself. They feel "Not Normal."
- It takes so much energy to get out of bed, be in the light, and do a normal everyday routine.
- Hygiene care may not have been a safe time...



Emotions impact the body before the brain.

- With the routines/rituals, there is that feeling of having control over something because they have lost so much.
- We expect kids who have experienced being taken from their natural parents to go back to school and keep with the same routine. Our expectations are so high for our kids. Becoming very quiet and reserved.
- Grief causes exhaustion. It makes you want to sleep. How are kids expected to go back to school and a full function?
- I can set this feeling aside and keep going, even though kids in therapy will say they don't want to talk about it. By not talking about it, they are getting through it.
- I want to try to stay away from heavy diagnoses with these kids as they are inaccurate and difficult to correct once in the kids' records.
- There is power in letting people know what they are feeling. Whatever it is, it is normal.
- Often, these kids are on an emotional rollercoaster. They are happy and then deeply sad.
- It is important to look for those triggers. They are set off by the kid's senses: sight, smell, touch, etc.

Stages of Grief: The five stages – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

- Developmentally, children feel that they are the center of the world. That makes the "I caused it " by being bad or not good extreme.
- I'm thinking about complicated grief and kids. When kids are switched foster homes or taken into custody, there may be a period when they seem like they've adjusted easily, but they don't show signs of grief until after some time- after six mos. or so...
- Finding Meaning by David Kessler, the 6th Stage of Grief- This is a great resource!



Case Study #1: What advice would you give if you were working with these children or their foster parents?

- Two things can be true at the same time: it can be challenging, and it can be an exciting new change.
- Give the children the chance to make new memories.
- Give them a name to the pain. When you name the pain, you give them power over the feeling.
- Anniversaries are so powerful. Reconnecting to the grief in a fresh way.
- Having more grace and communication during that time. Creating new traditions, asking them what they might like to create.
- Holidays seem to be hard for foster kiddos overall. Strength by the resource families is critical to help the kiddos through those times as well as the whole family.
- Help the foster parents understand the likelihood of this happening before the holiday... try to incorporate the appropriate rituals the kids have with their birth family. It's great that the kids are together! Don't forget the biological kids.
- As an OCS worker, I would make sure kids connected with parents in a special way (longer visits, off-site visits) around Christmas. That was nice to honor the traditions/connections with bio fam but also increase uncertainty for the kids or disrupt the plans foster parents have on Christmas...
- I think that we were making sure to repeatedly validate out loud to the kids that whatever they're feeling is ok and valid and that it's safe to feel those things and to name those feelings and talk about them if they want to.
- But also, be understanding if they DO NOT want/feel safe talking about it and sharing their feelings.
- Connect with the siblings who are placed with another resource family.



Adoption Competency Threads of Wisdom

- If we can help fosters and bios connect throughout the time, it could ease the holiday difficulties.
- Anniversaries are painful.
- Sometimes, behaviors can spike around anniversary dates...fosters (and therapists) need to be aware of these dates.
- Seasonal cues, even if they do not remember the day (around Easter)

Myths and Facts About Grief

- People “get over.” grief. Grief doesn’t have a time limit.
- Parents need to model appropriate grief to permit children to express their own grief.
- We are not the same person after expressing a huge loss. Loss can put so many things about our lives into perspective.
- I saw a great visual about grief and loss. It's a box with a ball in it. When the loss is fresh, the ball is extensive and always hits the box walls. The ball becomes smaller as time passes but still hits the box walls repeatedly. So, the pain/ball doesn't ever go away. It just doesn't always hit us the further you get away. If that makes sense.

Grief on Constellation members:

- New Legs: Penny Callan Partridge 1999
- Infants and Children Raised in Kinship/ Foster Families. Children's responses to loss and grief are different than adults.
- Babies and newborns suffer the most distress when exposed to trauma. Here is a link to that movie on the impact of violence on young children called First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and A Child's Developing Brain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEEVKDW5NDc>
- It's our job as parents and professionals to untangle and help name the stages of grief they are going through.



Symptoms of Childhood Grief:

- That relief will likely always have a tail. Trauma-based is certainly not a simple thing.
- And then they are diagnosed with ADD/ADHD
- Forgetting normal patterns
- And when they 'forget,' then they are considered defiant. "You KNOW" we always do this--you've done this 1000000 times.
- "willful, volitional behaviors..."

Ways Children Cope with Grief.

- Re: kids' ego-centric/magical thinking and "If I had done this better/differently." Often, they've heard that from their bio parents/other caregivers, too, when coming from abusive homes/situations. I work in a Children's Advocacy Center. One of the things we see often is abusive parents who justify it by telling their kids (and sometimes even us), "If you would just do this better/different..." both to justify their abuse as well as to control and keep the kids from disclosing physical or sexual abuse. And when a disclosure results in criminal charges, the child will often have other family members tell them, "It's your fault bad things are happening to our family."
- ACRF offices have children's books on adoption and foster care as well for checkout by parents or professionals.
- Resources: if you are in Anchorage, you can contact our office at 907-279-1799 or come over to the office on 840 K Street, STE 202, to browse through the library. We can also send you a list of our children's books for loan through the library. We also have offices in Fairbanks and Wasilla.



Grief: Through Ages and Stages:

- Schools and teachers must be careful with the exercises, i.e., “family trees, baby pictures, questions about what mom and dad do for a living” ...not the same for all kids! Never the kid's fault for their situation...
- The child may be able to express anger as it is safe to experience it with the new parents.

Case Study #2:

Question: How would you help the parents cope and bond with the baby?

- I love that she could visibly see the change in her son.
- Kids will fill in the blanks with their imagination.
- Relief is good; he may now be able to discuss and learn his story with his trusting adoption.
- Relief is a good thing, and he may now be able to discuss and learn his story with his trusting adoptive parents.
- This may open the door for a lot more questions, and those conversations will help with the relationship development, etc.

Case Study #3:

- Question: What would you say to a child who received this letter from their natural parent?
- Love looks different sometimes, not quite what you think it should. Have compassion and grace for that parent.
- This is emotionally loaded...I don't think I would want to share it in most situations...Children's needs come first! Whose needs are being met?
- This kind of letter can come from any caretaker. The letter should come from the child's line.



Adoption Competency

Threads of Wisdom

- I can't forget the biological children in the adoptive family.
- I had a family once where the adoptive parents were struggling, but their own child really was connecting with their adoptive child, and they were amazed at how well their son was doing such that they were learning from him how to handle things with their adoptive son.

Grief & Resiliency

- Resiliency occurs within the gift of a committed, caring, long-term, and meaningful relationship.
- Evaluation Link:
- Before you go, please fill out the evaluation for this session:
<https://form.jotform.com/231787308763163>

What Can We Do?

- Internally, for Adoptee,
- celebrate being alive!
- Nurture yourself.
- Experience your feelings and reminisce.
- Do not compare yourself to others!
- Be available to heal daily.
- Reflect on how you were taught about grief!
- Reflect on your resilience and on lessons learned about yourself.

Externally:

- Use your support system.
- Plan for grief triggers
- Create a ceremony or space that honors those who are lost.
- Create a loss history timeline.
- Write a letter to forgive yourself and others.
- List five feelings of grief.
- Describe the way you avoid the work of grieving.



Adoption Competency Threads of Wisdom

Tools for all constellation members: Adoptee community

- Find who supports you.
- How do you support others during grief
- Repeat your story of loss to others.
- Find role models.
- Be open to joining support groups or organizations.
- Find a good therapist.
- It is okay to go back and repeat this process.

Resources:

Alaska Cares: Alaska's children are experiencing child abuse and neglect at rates higher than almost any other state. Without treatment, that trauma can last into adulthood, affecting their health and well-being for a lifetime. We have the power to heal our children and our community.

With support, children experiencing abuse can find peace. Alaska CARES treats approximately 1,000 of Alaska's most vulnerable children every year. Providence Alaska Foundation

P.O. Box 196604

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[907-212-3600](tel:907-212-3600)

Forget Me Not Grief Center is a peer support program where kids can find others who look like them to help normalize grief. Meets in Anchorage every other Thursday.

How to help a grieving child:

There is nothing mentally that a piece of fresh bread with butter-roasted garlic cannot solve.

Create a consistent and predictable routine and set of expectations.