

CAUSES AND RESPONSES TO GRIEF AND TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

A. Overview of Topic. Children around the world experience grief and trauma; in developing nations, the rate is much higher than in the developed world. This workshop seeks to identify the primary variables and responses to inform parents/caregivers about the challenges a child or group of children might face on the road to healing.

B. Comparing and Contrasting Grief and Trauma.

1. Grief

A) Grief is a natural reaction to a perceived loss. It is both a universal and an individual experience.

B) Trauma is a Greek word that means “wound.” A wound may be physical or emotional, and though the experience is individualized, trauma is not universal. Trauma is a normal response to an abnormal situation.

C) Grief and trauma are both types of stress, and therefore a child suffering from either grief and/or trauma can experience any of the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or social symptoms that a person under stress might have (see other side).

F) There are many types of losses, but some common losses are: a) death; b) body part; c) relationship; d) housing; e) country; f) favorite object like a toy; g) goal or purpose. What might be insignificant to one child may be devastating to another. Typical symptoms of grief are: a) denial; b) shock; c) sadness; d) anger; e) fear; f) anxiety; g) guilt; h) shame; i) despair.

G) There are many theories on the grief process, but basically there are three main areas on the journey: a) The Initial Loss; b) The Valley of Weeping; and c) New Beginnings. If children do not go through the entire process and try to avoid the pain by using the false bridge, harmful thoughts, feelings and behaviors get trapped inside and have destructive results.

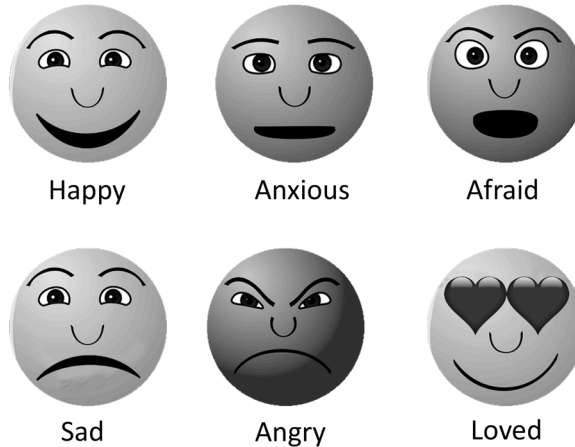
2. Trauma

The causes of trauma fall into three main categories: a) natural disasters; b) technological accidents; and c) acts of terrorism. Abuse is considered an act of terrorism. The human mind was not designed to face such intense experiences as trauma, and therefore often reacts more profoundly than it does to the normal grief process. While grief and trauma share many of the same symptoms, trauma symptoms are more severe, especially those as a result of acts of terrorism. Some of these symptoms are: a) flashbacks, b) avoidance and numbing (more serious), c) derealization, d) depersonalization, e) hypervigilance, and f) hypersensitivity.

C. The Stress Response. The stress response is different in each child due to uniqueness of the child and the stressors involved. Though there are some similarities, it is important to identify which internal and external variables create stress for the child you are serving. Children, just like adults, are complicated.

D. Summary. Understanding the variety of causes of grief and/or trauma and the multitude of variables that influence the child's response, the parent/caregiver is better positioned to be effective and compassionate in the healing approach.

Feeling Faces



Common Symptoms of Stress

<p><u>Physical</u></p> <p>Tiredness Headaches Back pain Stomach ache & diarrhea Loss of appetite & over eating Pounding Heart Increased or decreased sleep</p> <p><u>Emotional</u></p> <p>Sad Anxious Happy Afraid Angry Loved</p> <p><u>Spiritual</u></p> <p>Spiritual dryness - no excitement Unforgiveness Feeling far from God Questioning the meaning of life Loss of purpose Giving up faith</p>	<p><u>Behavioral</u></p> <p>Withdrawal from others or becoming dependent on them. Irritability and cynicism Speaking in slow, Monotonous voice or fast, agitated speech. Increased smoking or use of alcohol or drugs Promiscuity or loss of interest in sex. Verbal or physical aggression Playing war Bedwetting Poor school performance</p> <p><u>Thoughts</u></p> <p>Difficulty concentrating and remembering Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities Confusion and disorientation Hopelessness Suicidal thoughts Delusions</p>
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