

Grief and Loss: Strategic Support for Clients

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The FASD Learning Series is part of the Alberta government's commitment to programs and services for people affected by FASD and those who support them.

*I no longer trust my life that it will
stay with me - Natalie Goldberg*

*No Attachment; No Compassion
- Dalai Lama*

Session Goals

- To contribute to your personal and professional understanding of grief and loss
- To review specific issues related to grief and loss with individuals and families living with FASD
- To offer perspective on how to be with a child or adult who is living with grief and loss
- To know when to seek professional help

Loss, Grief and Suffering

- Definitions
- Kinds of Chronic Grief
 - Sorrow

Definitions

- **Acute Grief** follows the immediacy of loss which is often entangled by the loose ends of previous losses
- **Chronic Grief** presents as a persistent ache in the heart; the phantom pain of a loved one resulting from unresolved grief of earlier losses

Adapted from Stephen Levine

Kinds of Chronic Grief

- **Unresolved grief from earlier loss**
- **Inherent grief, ordinary grief that results from**
 - Unsatisfied desire
 - Frequently unfulfilled ambitions and lost loves
 - The battering impermanence of the world around us

Adapted from Stephen Levine

Sorrow

Sorrow is un-grieved losses related to

- Words spoken that can never be retrieved
- Repeated bruises left by unkindness
- Miscarriages, abortions, still birth
- Betrayals
- Lost opportunities
- Insults
- Unfinished business
- Trust broken
- Lies sent and received

Adapted from Stephen Levine

Loss is the absence of something that we were once attached to

Grief is the rope burns left behind, when that which is held is pulled beyond our grasp

Suffering is our unattended sorrow

Adapted from Stephen Levine

Take a moment and reflect on some of your own losses and what sorrow you are carrying with you



***How to Respond As a Therapist
to the Reservoir of Grief***

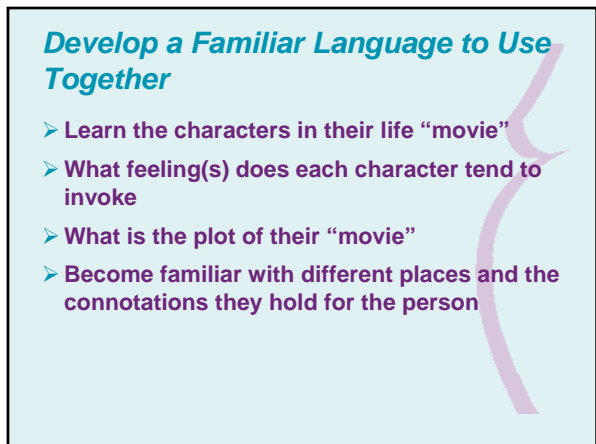
Create a Safe Place Together

- No interruptions
- No phone ringing
- Predictability of time
- Something to hold if needed
- Sit as you wish
- Something to drink
- Handy tissue



***Develop a Familiar Language to Use
Together***

- Learn the characters in their life “movie”
- What feeling(s) does each character tend to invoke
- What is the plot of their “movie”
- Become familiar with different places and the connotations they hold for the person



Develop a Familiar Language to Use Together

- Listen to their pain in the language of their experience even if you do not understand the language
- Learn the story and their feelings that go with the story

Show That You Can Resonate with What They Have Said

- Listen without interruption
- Be willing to hear whatever detail they want to tell you
- Be willing to hear it again and again
- Show that you can handle the feelings that they express in their words and on their face
- Learn their physical responses to their sorrow

Learn Their Unique Triggers



- Sight
 - Trucks
 - Fire
 - Water

Be respectful of the trigger

Learn Their Unique Triggers

➤ **Smells**

- Perfume
- Time of year



Be respectful of the trigger

Learn Their Unique Triggers



➤ **Sounds**

- Sirens
- Screaming
- Knock on the door

Be respectful of the trigger

Learn Key Anniversary Date

- Birth
- Death
- Hospitalization
- Apprehended from parents
- Pet died
- Suicide of friend

Give the Soul Attention

- Eye contact with choice to look at you or not or close your eyes and listen if they do not want you to look at them
- Be willing to give without asking for anything in return
- Be willing to sit in silence
- Be willing to listen to their music with them

Allow the Person to Hide

- Behind hair
- Behind a pillow
- Behind dark glasses
- Behind a smile
- Little children behind the couch or under the table
- Behind silliness
- Ask them what they do not want you to say

Tell the Child How You Feel While Reassuring What You Will Not Do

- Don't worry I won't do it, but I feel like hugging you
- I feel sad listening but I am okay

Other Responses

- Acknowledge that you are aware that talking does not always make them feel better
 - That it may make him feel worse
 - It may feel exhausting and take time to recover
- Also feelings may crescendo before a session

Other Responses

- Let them know that the pain will not have the same intensity forever and as time goes on will not last as long
- Be **with them** and **follow** rather than lead
- Help them learn that their old life has changed and they will **adjust** to their new life

Review a Child's Perception

If a child is grieving find out what they have been told about death

- Baby hung in mommy's tummy
- Grandma died from a sore throat
- Uncle died from a broken heart
- Only the good die young

Review a Child's Perception

If a child is grieving find out what they have been told about death (continued)

- Gone to heaven where life is wonderful and no pain
- She just died in her sleep

Think of how the concrete thinking of a child will perceive this

Complexity of Grief Issues with Persons Affected by FASD

Imagine Coping with Loss If You Have

- Brain differences related to FASD
- Sensitive nervous system related to FASD
 - Higher incidence of anxiety and depression
 - Sensitivity to sound, textures
 - Higher incident of psychiatric disorders
- Poor abstract reasoning skills
- Poor organization skills
- Difficulty with concept of time

Imagine Coping with Loss If You Have

- **Difficulty processing language**
 - **Poor receptive language skills with poor comprehension**
 - **Poor expressive language skills**
- **Poor impulse control**
- **Poor memory**
- **Difficulty with attachment**
- **Difficulty learning from consequences**
- **Poor social skills**

Imagine the Grief and Loss Of

- **Multiple placements**
- **No records of life history**
- **No photos or personal property**
- **Abuse and neglect**
 - **Sexual**
 - **Physical**
 - **Emotional**
- **Involvement with the justice system**

Imagine the Grief and Loss Of

- **Death or suicide of birth parents**
- **Loss of siblings**
- **Loss of pets**
- **Loss of friends**
- **Loss of extended family**
- **Loss of culture / language**
- **Loss of consistent medical care**
- **Loss of name and identity**

Imagine the Grief and Loss Of

- Adoption disruption
- Loss of independent future
- Loss of potential to have children
- Loss of relinquished child
- Loss of innocence or loss of opportunity for innocence
- Loss of seeing potential for pleasure in life

Strategies for Treating Individuals Affected by FASD Who Are Living with Grief and Loss

Treatment Strategies

- Keep in mind that each person with FASD is unique
- Individuals with FASD are not a homogeneous group
- Each person has a range of skills and each indicator of FASD may not apply to everyone
- FASD may not be their biggest challenge

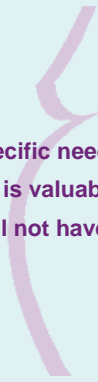
Treatment Strategies

- Individuals with FASD are a product of
 - Temperament
 - Environment
 - Brain function
 - Spirituality



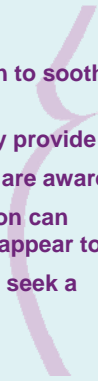
Treatment Strategies

- Follow the individual: Do not lead
- Work at their speed
- Find an approach that meets their specific need
- Just being with the person over time is valuable
- Let the person know that the pain will not have the same intensity and duration



Treatment Strategies

- Be aware of trying to resolve their pain to soothe your own discomfort
- If they ask for help even in a small way provide it
 - It may be more significant than you are aware
- Do not assume that a competent person can cope in the chaos of loss even if they appear to
- If their grief strikes too close to home, seek a confidante for yourself



Treatment Strategies

- Do not try to erase quickly the smell of the deceased
 - Smell can be very comforting and needs to take its course before the person is ready to move on
- Do what works for the person not what you think would work for you
- Write in a journal

Therapeutic Activities

- Develop chronological history
 - Review of records
 - Placements
 - Schools
 - Anniversary dates
 - Integrate photos (if they exist) into one album and make copies for safe keeping
 - Recreate child's memory of important events through drawings

Therapeutic Activities

- Create a map of their world
 - As it existed
 - As the person perceives it now
 - As the child perceives it in the future
- Teach signs in American Sign Language and the facial expressions in order to facilitate emotional expression

Therapeutic Activities

- Drawings
 - Refer to an art therapist
 - Facilitate drawing
 - Draw the outline of a body and colour in the feelings
- Open ended stories
- If the child is hesitant to speak, talk in gibberish and provide an appropriate emotional response in gibberish



Listen to the person in the language of their loss even if it is not a language that you understand

Grief of Professionals

- Professional Experiences Leading to Grief
- Strategies for Dealing with Grief of Professionals
 - Case Examples



Professional Experiences Leading to Grief

Grief of professionals can often be related to:

- Loss of a client through death, suicide
- A client who has committed violence against others
- Working for an institution that does not permit acknowledgment of your relationship with a client
- Loss of profession due to retirement
- Loss of status
 - Aging

Professionals Experiences Leading to Grief

Grief of professionals can often be related to:

- Informal excommunication for being a whistle blower or a person of strong ethics
- Loss of student in supervision
- Failure to see what was going on thus feeling like a contributor to injustice
- Failure to protect adequately
- Loss of trust in own judgment
- Shattering of person and societal myths

Professionals Experiences Leading to Grief

Grief of professionals can often be related to:

- Policy precludes your ability to use preferred judgment
- Loss of professional pride and dignity
- Loss of idealism
- Loss of recognition
- Survivor guilt
- Loss of sense of adequacy and competency
- Identification with own issues of loss

Professionals Experiences Leading to Grief

Many of these experiences lead to the symptoms related to Complex Stress Syndrome


- Refer to Dr. Pat Fisher - Complex Stress Syndrome

Strategies for Dealing with Grief of Professionals

- Develop a support group
- Share your experiences with a colleague or mentor
- Journal
- Learn to meditate
- Read books that make you feel not alone


Strategies for Dealing with Grief of Professionals

- Pursue therapy
- Take time off work
- Exercise
- Optimize nutrition
- Write to those that you have unfinished business with




Case Example

- 10 year old girl, whose 8 year old sister died when she was 4



Case Example

- 34 year old mother affected by FASD whose child died

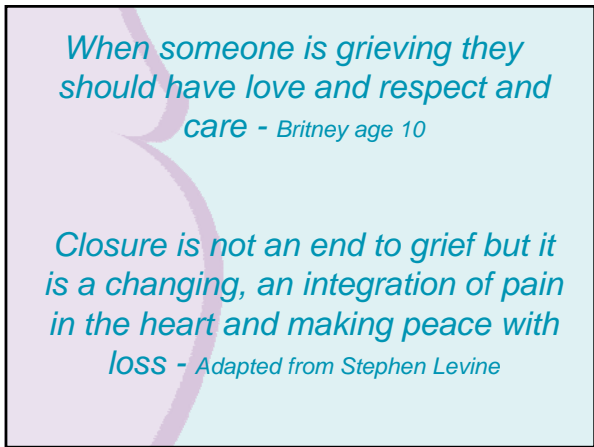


Case Example

- 60 year old male whose terminally ill wife died a day after the birth of their premature baby

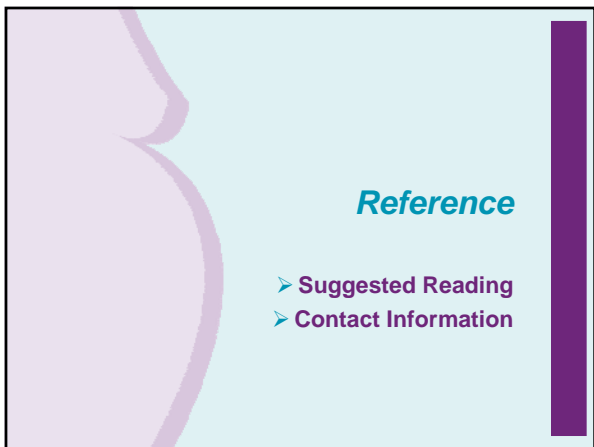


Closing Thoughts



When someone is grieving they should have love and respect and care - Britney age 10

Closure is not an end to grief but it is a changing, an integration of pain in the heart and making peace with loss - Adapted from Stephen Levine



Reference

- Suggested Reading
- Contact Information

Suggested Reading

- Why it is all about you? (*Hotchkiss*)
- Snakes in Suits (*Robert Hare*)
- Children of the Self-Absorbed
- The Neuroscience and Human Relationships (*Louis Cozolino*)
- Unattended Sorrow (*Stephen Levine*)
- The Grief Recovery Handbook (*John James and Frank Cherry*)

More Information on FASD and Grief and Loss Can Be Found on the FASD CMC Website

<http://www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca/home/572.cfm>

- The Ongoing Face of Grief and Loss and the Theory Behind It

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the On-Line Evaluation***

Thank You!
