Anticipatory Grief:  
*Help Clients Face Impending Loss and Uncertain Futures*

Erica H. Sirrine, Ph.D., LCSW, FT
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Erica H. Sirrine, Ph.D., LCSW, FT, is a licensed clinical social worker, qualified clinical supervisor and the dean of the School of Social Work at Southeastern University. She has over 17 years of experience in the field of death, dying and bereavement and has been awarded the distinction of Fellow in Thanatology by the Association for Death Education and Counseling. She has conducted and published research on the continuing bonds maintained by survivors following a death, and she recently authored and published *Sammy’s Story*, an anticipatory grief counseling book for young children experiencing the serious illness of a loved one.

Dr. Sirrine has extensive expertise providing individual and group therapy to bereaved children, adolescents, adults and families. She has implemented numerous interventions and programs aimed at improving the emotional health of clients experiencing loss. Dr. Sirrine presents seminars on bereavement and loss throughout the United States and is known for her interactive and engaging workshops. She has been distinguished as “Professor of the Year” and the National Association of Social Workers Heartland, Florida Unit’s “Social Worker of the Year.”

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*Materials that are included in this course may include interventions and modalities that are beyond the authorized practice of mental health professionals. As a licensed professional, you are responsible for reviewing the scope of practice, including activities that are defined in law as beyond the boundaries of practice in accordance with and in compliance with your professions standards.*
Grief Summit 2021:
Anticipatory Grief- Helping Clients Cope in the Face of Impending Loss and Uncertain Futures

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APA Disclosure

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Anticipatory Grief

“Stages of Death and Dying” (DABDA)
Sustained Hope in Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory Grief Emotions
Common Anticipatory Grief Reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regressive Behaviors</th>
<th>Guilt/Regret</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magical Thinking</td>
<td>Fear/Anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disbelief/Confusion</td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Concentrating/Forgetfulness</td>
<td>Faith/Spirituality Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in school work/grades</td>
<td>Isolation/Loneliness</td>
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<td>Sadness/Depression</td>
<td>“Grief Bursts”</td>
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<td>Mood Changes</td>
<td>Physical Symptoms (stomach/headaches, etc.)</td>
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<td>Anger/Protest</td>
<td>Sleep Problems/Disturbances</td>
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<td>Acting out/Aggressive behavior</td>
<td>Lethargy/Fatigue</td>
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The Pandemic’s Impact on Grief

- Increased Isolation
- Fewer Opportunities for Face-to-Face Support
- Support System is Now Coping with their Own Losses
- Disguised/Masked Grief
- Loss of Funeral/Memorialization Rituals
- Loss of Control
Continuing Bonds

Sigmund Freud’s Grief Work Theory
John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory
Physical vs. Emotional Attachment

Anticipatory Grief Interventions
Before the Death

Anticipatory Grief Counseling- Case Example: “Heather”
Provide Death Education and Practical Support
Linking Objects
Legacy Journals/Letters/Video
Video Diaries/Life Review
Anticipatory Grief Retreats and Hope@Home Groups
Inheritance of Hope
Anticipatory Grief Interventions

After the Death

- Attend Funeral/Memorial Service
- Condolence Calls/Letters/Flowers
- Prepare Children and Adults to Return to School/Work
- Prepare Children to Attend Funeral/Memorial Service

Talking to Kids about Terminal Illness

Do’s and Don’ts

Do:
- Be honest, clear, and direct
- Normalize feelings of anticipatory grief
- Model healthy mourning behaviors and coping skills
- Use concrete terms when discussing illness and death
- Foster an environment encouraging open and honest dialogue about the impending death
- Provide a caring and supportive environment
- Provide opportunities for memorialization/funeral rituals

Don’t:
- Lie or conceal the reality
- Avoid the subject
- Use platitudes or euphemisms
Explaining the Dying Process to Children

- Identify a trustworthy adult to be present
- Be honest and encourage questions
- Prepare children in advance about medical equipment/devices/personnel in the room
- Discuss the body’s process of dying
- Allow continued communication with person who is ill (per developmental age)
- Emphasize that hearing remains until the end

Preparing Kids for Funerals and Memorials

- Educate about Funeral Ritual (Who, What, When, Where, Why)
- Discuss Expected Emotions/Grief Reactions of Adults
- Explain Body Disposition/Viewing Expectations
- Prepare Activities for Younger Children- Case Example: “Poster Boards, Pictures, and Memories”
- Allow Children/Teens to Participate in Planning
- Identify a Supportive Adult
- Never Force a Child to Attend
Preparing for Return to School

Notify Caregivers of Death
   Teachers, guidance counselors, principal, extracurricular activity directors, and coaches
Educate Caregivers about Death
   Expected and normal grief reactions
   Classroom/schoolwork/homework needs
Identification of “safe” support person and place
Prepare fellow students

Preparing for Return to School/Work

Provide Psycho-education for Successful Reintegration
   Management of grief waves and reactions
   Emotional time-outs
   Cognitive/concentration difficulties
   Preparation for questioning by others
   Possible feelings of isolation (feeling ignored)
Identifying Sources of Support

Activity:
Circle of Support
Love after Loss: An Illustration
Hope and Healing Amid Anticipatory Grief

“Truly it is in darkness that one finds the light, so when we are in sorrow, then this light is nearest of all to us.”

-Meister Eckhart

Questions?
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Anticipatory Grief

References


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