Kids and Loss: 
How to Work with the Uniqueness of a Child’s Grief

Erica H. Sirrine, Ph.D., LCSW, FT
Kids and Loss:

*How to Work with the Uniqueness of a Child’s Grief*

Erica H. Sirrine, Ph.D., LCSW, FT
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.”

Speaker Disclosure:
Financial: Erica Sirrine receives compensation as an Associate Professor at Southeastern University. She receives a speaking honorarium from PESI, Inc.
Non-financial: Erica Sirrine is a member of the National Association of Social Workers, The Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors, the National Alliance for Grieving Children, and the Florida Association of Deans and Directors. She does not receive compensation.

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:
Supporting Grieving Children & Adolescents

Dr. Erica Sirrine, Ph.D., LCSW, FT
www.hopeandgrief.com

APA Disclosure

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.
Parental and Sibling Loss

Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model
judishouse.org

Childhood Bereavement
Resources

National Alliance for Grieving Children
https://childrengrieve.org

Doug Center- The National Center for Grieving Children and Families
https://www.dougy.org

Judi’s House/JAG Institute
https://judishouse.org
Non-Death Losses and Children

- Divorce
- Parental Separation
- Parental Incarceration
- Adoption
- Foster Care/Termination of Parental Rights
- Move/Relocation
- Military Deployment
- Peer Group/Friendship Changes
- Social Status Changes
- School Change
- Parental Unemployment
- Illness
- Parental Substance Use/Mental Illness

Grief vs. Mourning
A Distinction

Grief

“Deep sorrow”

Mourning

“The (outward) expression of deep sorrow”

“The act of sorrowing”


“Getting Over It” vs. Reconciliation

**Core Tenets and Principles of Grief-Informed Practice**

*Douggy Center (Schuurman & Mitchell, 2020)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural</th>
<th>Personal Empowerment &amp; Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpathological &amp; Complex</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Person-Centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Connection &amp; Perceived Support</td>
<td>Non-Finite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distinctions
Between Adult and Youth Responses to Loss

“Forgotten Mourners”
Impacted by Cognitive Development
Impacted by Adults (and how those adults allow or avoid emotions)
Use of Play to Cope (Actions vs. Words)- “Decoding” Behavior
Peer Relationships/Social Status Changes

Cognitive Components
Of Understanding Death in Childhood

Universality
Irreversibility
Nonfunctionality
Causality
Grief Emotions

Common Grief Reactions

- Regressive Behaviors
- Magical Thinking
- Disbelief/Confusion
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Change in school work/grades
- Sadness/Depression
- Mood Changes
- Anger/Protest
- Acting out/Aggressive behavior
- Guilt/Regret
- Fear/Anxiety
- Faith/Spirituality Questions
- Isolation/Loneliness
- “Grief Bursts”
- Physical Symptoms (tummy/headaches, etc.)
- Sleep Problems/Disturbances
- Lethargy/Fatigue
- Continuing Bonds/Mystical Experiences
“Things We Want Adults to Know about our Grief”

School-Based and Support Group Bereavement Interventions
Considerations for School-Based Counseling

Parental Permission
Relationships with Constituents
Maintaining Confidentiality
Counseling location, student comfort level, staff questions- Case Example: “High School”
Parental Communication and Follow-Up

Support Group Considerations

Structure
Open vs. Closed
Duration/Frequency of Meetings
Facilitators- Therapists vs. Trained Peer Volunteers
Number of Participants
Adult, Youth, or Youth and Parent/Caregiver
Pre-Screening
Family Bereavement Program
Evidence-Based, Family Support Group Intervention

Developed for parentally-bereaved youth and caregivers (Ayers et al., Sandler et al.).
Focuses on reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors
Youth and Caregiver Program
  Child (ages 8-12)
  Adolescent (ages 12-16)
12 group sessions (2 hours each)
Focuses on psychoeducation, coping, and caregiver skills
Training manuals available for youth and caregiver groups (Ayers et al.)

Pathfinders Program- Judi’s House
Newly Developed (Evidence-Informed)

Developed at Judi’s House (Griese, Burns, & Farro, 2018)
Combines elements of evidence based treatments including the FBP, TF-CBT, and GTI with peer
grief support group approaches
Acknowledges that grief is uniquely experienced by each person
Avoids minimizing or pathologizing
Strengths-based
Focuses on “decreasing disruptive grief reactions” while “increasing restorative grief
experiences”
10 sessions (three phases), 50-90 minutes in length
Three curricula- Children (3-11 years), Adolescents (12-18 years), Adults
**General Grief Support Group**  
**Weekly Session Topic Outline**

- My Loss Story (Death/Grief Narrative)
- Coping With and Expressing Feelings of Loss (Anger)
- Seeking Support after Loss
- Coping with Changes Caused by the Loss (Good and Bad Changes)
- Self Care following Loss
- Remembering the Loss/Sharing Memories (Positive and Negative)
- Honoring the Loss/Memorializing (Continuing Bonds)
- Final Group/Meal Sharing/Strengths-Based
“If ever there is a tomorrow when we're not together.. there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart...I'll always be with you.”

- Winnie the Pooh

Questions?
erica@hopeandgrief.com
Online Resources

www.bosplace.org
http://childrengrieve.org/
www.dougy.org
https://judishouse.org
https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief/
Supporting Grieving Children and Adolescents

References


