

# FACILITATING SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

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# FACILITATING SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS TRAINING WORKSHOP 1: INTRODUCTION TO CHILD/TEEN GRIEF

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# Introduction

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# What We Know About Child/Teen Grief

- Grief is a natural reaction to loss. After any loss there is grief.
- We all have within us what is best for our healing, trust yourself in the process.
- Grief is different for everyone, there is no wrong way to grieve.
- Grief is not on a time schedule-you don't get "over it" in a certain amount of time.

# Differences Between Child and Adult Grief

- Children's grief is wholistic – they use their whole body
  - emotional, physical, behavioral, cognitive, and spiritual
- Children/teen grief usually comes and goes in short bursts, not on any schedule
- They don't often have a history of grief, so they need someone to model appropriate grief behaviors
- Teens don't have the adult experience of grief - remember they are still kids, not small adults

# How Suicide Death is Different

- Suicide death has complications
  - Words can be hurtful: “committed suicide” “selfish act” “didn’t love you”
  - People say it was their own choice, at their own hand
  - The Why Question: trying to understand and make meaning
  - The stigma is big and real
  - Guilt: “was it my fault?” “could I have stopped it?”
  - Blame: “who was responsible?”
  - Abandonment: “didn’t they love me?” “why would they leave me?”
  - Concerns: “will I end up dying by suicide too?” “who will take care of me if you die?”
  - Possible trauma: finding the body, imagining what it was like
  - Relief if the person had major disruptive mental health challenges
  - Loss of friends and family who don’t know how to deal with suicide

# Role of Facilitators

- To facilitate means “to make easy”
- Provide a safe place for children/teens to grieve
- Be present to witness their grief story
- Listen without judgment, trying to fix it or make it better
- Allow the child/teen to lead the play or discussion
- Protect confidentiality
- Support and enforce the safety guidelines
- Model appropriate grief reactions
- Provide structure and rituals of the group
- Come prepared to facilitate group

# Small Group Discussion -10 minutes

- Why do you want to facilitate groups?
- What will you bring to a support group process - your interests, strengths?
- What do you imagine are the challenges or concerns you may face in the group?



# Are You Ready to Facilitate a Group?

- Have you done your own grief work, and are you ready to help others?
- Are you mindful of your personal losses and how they influence your response to others?
- Can you dedicate the time required to be at all the meetings?
- Can you make a year long commitment?
- Are you aware of your beliefs, prejudices, and biases, and can you set them aside during the group?
- Are you able to co-facilitate a group, sharing leadership?
- Can you be present, listening without trying to fix the grief?
- Do you have a self-care plan to help yourself and use it?
- Are you comfortable around grieving children and teens?

# What a Peer Support Group Is and Isn't

- It is:
  - A place for children and teens to express their grief in a safe environment
  - A place to find others who've had similar experiences, feel that they are not alone, and know there are others like them
  - A place they can talk about and question hard things
  - A place to listen to others and hear how others have handled a situation
  - A place to share stories and remember the person who died
  - A place to take a break from grief for a little while
- It is not
  - Therapy or counseling
  - A place where you will fix what is wrong
  - A place to find someone who will tell you how to grieve

# Developing A Safe Environment

- Have a routine that is consistent and predictable
  - Stick to the scheduled routine for every meeting
- Develop group cohesion
  - Welcome each member, encourage connections, respect physical boundaries (no touching without being asked)
- Develop group safety guidelines and enforce them
  - What we say here stays here
  - Be kind - No hurting others or yourself, physically or emotionally
  - “I pass” - You don’t have to talk unless you want to
  - Be respectful to others - share time and listen when others talk
- Develop Rituals
  - Opening, closing, saying goodbye, special days

# Basic Facilitation Skills

- Mindfulness
  - Be aware of the present moment - acknowledge and accept your feelings, thoughts, and body sensations
  - Be aware of the children/teens - their body, reactions, energy, voice tone
  - Be aware of the environment – feeling of the room, temperature, energy, safety
- Reflective Responding
  - Be present, show interest in their stories
  - Reflect the words or behaviors you see and hear - not what you think
  - Encourage them to say more, that you are listening and interested
  - Listen to what they say, letting them know you hear what they are saying
- Trust the process

# Group Facilitation Skills

- Making Connections
  - Find similarities, common experiences, “we all have had someone die by suicide”
- Noticing Differences
  - Acknowledge difference, its ok to have a different experience, “who died is different”, “some of you cried and others say they didn’t”
- Identifying Common Themes
  - Notice themes that come up during discussions, “a lot of you have talked about feeling it was your fault that the person died,” “some of us still wonder why they killed themselves”
    - Shame/stigma, abandonment, isolation, guilt, relief, sadness
    - Worry about others dying, who will take care of them
    - Wondering if they will die of suicide as well
    - Making meaning – why??

# Facilitating Communication Skills

- Effective listening
  - Show interest, appropriate eye contact, reflect their words
- Allow for Silence
  - Time to gather thoughts
- Appropriate Questions
  - Ask questions sparingly - kids feel they must answer an adult
  - Open-ended rather than closed “what was the hardest thing for you after your dad died” rather than “who died in your family”
  - Ask questions that will allow kids to expand their story
- Clarifying
  - Check out your understanding, “let me see if I understand”
- Summarizing
  - When the story is long, listen for the important points

# Roadblocks to Communication

- Directing - “you should ....”
- Warning - “if you do that you will be sorry”
- Questions - “how do you feel about ...”
- Teaching - expressing that you are the expert
- Blaming - “it’s your fault your mom killed herself”
- Voice tone - angry, not believing
- Body language - arms folded, eye rolling
- Giving advice - “if I were you I would...”
- Changing subject - uncomfortable with topic so change it
- Name calling - “stupid”

# Practice Group

- 6-7 person break out groups (if time permits)
- 2 facilitators, 4-5 group participants, rotate roles every 3 minutes so everyone gets to practice facilitating
  - Facilitators pose a new question – practice group skills
  - Participants answer as themselves
- Question (examples):
  - what are ways you take care of yourself?
  - talk about a gift you received from a special person
  - share your favorite sweet treat
  - what your perfect day would look like



# Questions/Discussion

- What was group like?
- What skill did you use?
- What was hard?
- What went well?

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