

TAPS
Institute for Hope and Healing

Understanding Children's Grief

Vicki Jay
CEO, National Alliance for Grieving Children

Robert Arrington
President, Arrington Funeral Directors
2017-2018 Chair, Funeral Service Foundation

Moderator
Kenneth Doka, PhD, MDiv
Professor of Gerontology, The College of New Rochelle

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Presented by Boeing



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Why children and grief?

- 1 in 15 children will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18*
- 6.8% of children are bereaved*

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Census Bureau

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Types of loss

- Parental loss
- Sibling loss
- Grandparent loss
- Suicide
- Military
- Other close losses (pets, more distant relatives, teachers)



Leading causes of death

- Youth
Ages 1-25 Years**
- #1 Unintentional Accidents
 - #2 Homicide
 - #3 Suicide
 - #4 Cancer
 - #5 Heart Disease

- Adults
Ages 26-55**
- #1 Cancer
 - #2 Heart Disease
 - #3 Unintentional Accidents
 - #4 Suicide
 - #5 Liver Disease

What is grief?

Grief is...

- Universal
- Unique
- Lifelong



What is grief?

Definition—

- Internal response to an external event



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<i>Physical</i>	<i>Mental</i>
<i>Spiritual</i>	<i>Emotional</i>

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Five to eight years

- Want to understand death in concrete way, but that it will not happen to them
- Denial, anger, sorrow
- General distress, disoriented, confused
- May behave as if nothing has happened
- Desires to conform with peers
- May ask questions repeatedly
- May need physical activity on regular basis
- Fear of losing remaining caregiver
- Clinging/separation/anxious behaviors

Concept of Death

- “Magical thinking”
- May believe they “caused it”
- Fear of separation or abandonment

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Nine to eleven years

- Shock, denial, anxiety, distress
- Facade of coping
- Finality of death understood
- Phobic behavior, morbid curiosity
- May need physical activity on regular basis
- Fear of losing remaining caregiver
- Clinging/Separation/Anxious behaviors

Concept of Death

- See death as final
- Interested in biological processes, burial & cremation

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Eleven to fourteen years

- Shock, denial, anxiety, distress
- Exhaustion – Puberty
- Easily distracted
- "Re-Grief" Phenomenon (Transitional life S=stages)
- Peer conformity

Concept of Death

- Understand that death impacts their family and social relationships

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Adolescence

- Shock, disbelief, distress, confusion
- Depression/sadness
- Withdrawal, detachment
- Anxiety, panic, anger, aggression (internal/external)
- "Re-Grief" Phenomenon (Transitional life stages)
- Conflicting needs to socialize and "hide" from others
- Confusion as to source of emotions (grief or hormones)

Concept of Death

- Turn to peers for support
- Hide their grief
- Overwhelming feelings

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What are factors that impact grief?

- Other life stressors and previous losses
- Relationship to the ill person or deceased
- Cause of death or illness
- Religious and cultural differences
- Family dynamics and ability to cope
- Age, gender
- Opportunity to say goodbye, how they found out
- Disenfranchisement

Military loss

- Military culture
- Traumatic death
- Non-Traumatic death
- Suicide death
- System of support



Needs include-


- Honesty
- Appropriate language
- Time
- Naturalness
- Tools



What do children & teens need?

- To be acknowledged
- To have permission
- To express emotions
- To go on living


We all have the capacity to heal and grow . . . even in our grief



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After loss

- New normal
- School
- Family
- Peer support
- Counseling or therapy




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<p>What to say...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comforting phrases that can be used – “Do’s” • <i>I’m sorry</i> • <i>I wish things could have ended differently</i> • <i>I don’t know what to say</i> • <i>I feel sad</i> • <i>I am sad for you</i> • <i>Do you have any questions?</i> • <i>We can talk again later</i> 	<p>What not to say...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phrases to avoid – “Don’ts” • <i>It’s best this way</i> • <i>Everything happens for a reason</i> • <i>It could be worse</i> • <i>They are in a better place</i> • <i>Time will heal</i> • <i>Count your blessings</i> • <i>Personal religious beliefs</i>
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How do we help?

- Listen with attention
- Do not try to fix it
- Sit quietly
- Allow for the expression of all feelings and validates them
- Keep the focus on the person in pain



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YOUTH & FUNERALS

Understanding the important role funerals and memorialization play in the lives of youth

Resources are available in English & Spanish to help you create meaningful and healing memorialization experiences for families and communities

12-PAGE BOOKLET
CUSTOMIZE AND PURCHASE WITH YOUR LOGO

E-BOOK & VIDEO
FREE TO SHARE ON YOUR WEBSITE

LEARN MORE
FuneralServiceFoundation.org



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YOUTH & FUNERALS

DISCUSSING DEATH AND FUNERALS

The death of a loved one is a painful, and often overwhelming, experience at any age. Amidst coping with your own grief, you may be faced with talking to your child about death and dying, and might find that you struggle with the question, "Should my child attend the funeral?"



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YOUTH & FUNERALS

FUNERALS AND RITUALS HELP US

- Recognize the reality of death
- Remember the person who died
- Receive support from others
- Act on feelings that otherwise may be repressed
- Search for meaning and fill the empty void of loss
- Remember and recount the past with gratitude
- Acknowledge positive outcomes

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DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS

Exclusion from the memorialization process may lead a child to:

- Create fear-based fantasies
- Miss out on receiving comfort and support

YES, it is appropriate for youth to attend a funeral.

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DISCUSSING DEATH AND FUNERALS

Have direct, open and honest conversations about:

- Death
- Funerals
- Burial
- Cremation

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YOUTH & FUNERALS

DISCUSSING DEATH AND FUNERALS


- Traditions, beliefs and customs
- Memorialization options

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YOUTH & FUNERALS

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN MEMORIALIZATION

Simply attending the funeral will help your child begin processing his or her grief. But whenever possible, consider including youth of all ages in the planning of the funeral/memorial service to help them feel connected and involved.




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PREPARING YOUTH FOR FUNERAL ATTENDANCE

When your child makes the decision to attend a funeral, help prepare him or her for the event by explaining what he or she will see and feel, and what others may be doing. Even the smallest details shared in advance will help your child feel more comfortable with his or her decision.



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PREPARING YOUTH FOR FUNERAL ATTENDANCE

- Explain who and what youth might see
- Talk about emotions and how people might be feeling
- Explain the order of the day
- Point out personal touches

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PREPARING YOUTH FOR FUNERAL ATTENDANCE


- Give youth choices and control
- Normalize the experience
- Encourage questions
- When youth choose not to attend a funeral

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PREPARING YOUTH FOR VIEWING LOVED ONES

Children often want to be included in what others around them are seeing. You may be uncomfortable with the idea of your child viewing the deceased, but it's important to remember that children have big imaginations, and that fantasies can be far scarier than the actual experience.



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PREPARING YOUTH FOR VIEWING LOVED ONES

Offer clear and honest information about:

- Open or closed casket
- How the loved one's body may look and feel
- When the body isn't present

Reach out to a funeral service professional for guidance.

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CONTINUE TO CONNECT


- Continue to offer comfort
- Encourage questions
- Continue old traditions or begin new ones
- Participate in community memorial events


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Questions?




Vicki Jay
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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing, through an alliance with HFA, serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public. The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing was launched in March 2018.



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Upcoming TAPS Institute programs

All programs will be live webinars and will take place from 12:00-1:30 p.m. ET. To learn more and register for these programs, visit <https://www.taps.org/institute>.

- August 21 — *#grief: Social Media and Mourning*^{††}
 - Presenters: **Kelly Rossetto**, PhD, Assistant Professor, Boise State University and **Michelle Post**, MA, LMFT, CTBS, Manager of Donor Family Aftercare, OneLegacy
- August 23 — *Coping with Grief, Reaching Out for Support*
 - Presenters: **Heidi Horsley**, PSYD, LMSW, MS, Co-founder, Open to Hope and **Debbie Rambis**, Executive Director, The Compassionate Friends
 - Moderator: **Gloria Horsley**, PhD, MS, CNS, Co-founder, Open to Hope

* Continuing Education Available
† Program in partnership with Hospice Foundation of America

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