Absent & Present: Helping Students Cope with Loss

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1. Identify ambiguous losses students experience.
2. Explain potential impacts on school success and social/emotional development.
3. Strategize ways to help students cope with ambiguous loss.

Pair & Share

- In what ways do I see students experiencing loss?
- In what ways do my students express their grief?

Grounding Definitions

- Loss = Any experience across the lifespan that demands the surrender of something personally significant and/or familiar (Whiting, 1986)
- Grief = The reaction to loss (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2000)
  - Emotional, physical, mental, behavioral, interpersonal, & spiritual reactions to loss
- Mourning = The “work” of grief
Grief Expectations

“In the United States, there is a tendency to criticize and judge how people grieve their losses, especially if they take more time than we think they should. The cultural value is to get over it, find closure, and move on.”

- Boss, 2004, p. 561

Types of Loss

- Anticipated/Expected
- Unexpected/Sudden
- Catastrophic
- Ambiguous

Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2004)

- No possibility of closure
- Experience of loss plus ambiguity
- Relational and emotional processes freeze
- Family roles become confusing
- Stress is traumatizing and immobilizing

Potential Impacts of Ambiguous Loss

- Relational changes
- Circumstantial instability
- Stigma and disenfranchised grief
  - Occurs when people experience a loss that is not openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly mourned.
  - Correlates with higher levels of anger, guilt, & confusion (Doka, 2009)
### Manifestations of Childhood Grief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preschoolers (ages 3-5)</th>
<th>Children (6-10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tantrums, fighting</td>
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### Considering Adolescent Grief

- Developmental roles and tasks of adolescence
- More complex understanding of death & loss
- Expressions of grief behaviorally or physically
- Expression of grief unique to individual and culturally bound

### With adolescents, watch for...

- Symptoms of chronic depression, sleeping difficulties, restlessness and low self-esteem
- Academic failure or indifference to school-related activities
- Deterioration of relationships with family and friends
- Risk-taking behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, and sexual experimentation
- Denying pain while at the same time acting overly strong or mature

### Needs of Grieving Children

- Clear, comprehensible information
- Soothing of fear and anxiety
- Reassurance that they are not responsible
- Empathic listening
- Validation of thoughts and feelings
- Perspective with emotions
- Involvement and inclusion before, during, and after the death occurs
- Continued interests and activities
- Grief behaviors modeled by adults

Source: The Harvard Child Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996)
Counseling Considerations: Anticipated/Expected Losses

- Encourage seizing the gift of time
- Help identify what needs to be “finished”
- Sitting with tears, silence, anger . . .
- Listening to what needs to be expressed and is
- Listening to what isn’t expressed and what might not need to be

Counseling Considerations: Sudden/Unexpected Losses

- Expect “why” questions
- Use the name of the victim
- Let the survivor bear witness
- Pay special attention to “trigger” events

Counseling Considerations: Ambiguous Loss

- Validate presence of loved one even in absence
- Focus on resilience and coping skills rather than closure
- Process potential feelings of guilt and self-blame
- Make meaning of the experience

Resilience

- Characteristics of resilient children (Bernard, 1995):
  - social competence (e.g., empathy, flexibility, and positive relationships)
  - problem-solving skills (e.g., planning, resourcefulness)
  - critical consciousness (e.g., awareness of barriers and strategies to overcome)
  - autonomy (e.g., self-efficacy and internal locus of control)
  - a sense of purpose (e.g., goals or aspirations)
- Build resilience by emphasizing strengths and adaptivity rather than focusing on deficits & problems beyond control of students
School Counselor Response to Ambiguous Loss

Delivery Services
- Checking in
- Proactive response with academics
- Provide information & resources to stakeholders
  - Teacher Training: https://grievingstudents.org/resources/additional-resources/
- Talk about it - acknowledge the loss
- Integrate services across MTSS

Selected Resources
- Sesame Street Tool Kits (Divorce, Incarceration, Military Families, Grief, Resilience): https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/
- Evidence-Based Trauma-Informed Care Groups: CBITS Program & CBITS Guide, SSET Program, Bounce Back Program
- Children’s Booklist for Coping with Loss: www.nasponline.org/x33507.xml
- Moyer Foundation Resource Center: https://moyerfoundation.org/resources/
- Coalition to Support Grieving Students: https://grievingstudents.org/
- Shared Grief Project: http://sharedgrief.org/
- What’s Your Grief: https://whatsyourgrief.com/

Addressing Loss in a Comprehensive School Counseling Program
- Foundation
  - Mission & ASCA Code of Ethics
- Management
  - Responsive to student needs
- Delivery Services
  - Counseling, consultation, & referrals
- Accountability
  - Use data to demonstrate effectiveness of services

Individual Counseling:
- validate parental presence, resilience & coping skills, process guilt or self-blame

Group Counseling:
- peer support, emotional processing

Core Curriculum:
- Empathy, social justice, coping skills

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Fostering Resilience Prompts

1. What’s your story? What are significant events in your past? How did you feel in each situation? Who or what controlled the event?
2. Who’s on your team? Who’s always there supporting you and who defends you and helps you defend yourself?
3. What are your strengths and talents? How do these help you in difficult times?
4. You’re not alone. What are your goals? Who can you ask for help when you need it?
5. Your story is up to you. What’s next in your story?

Focus: Parental Incarceration

5 million (1 in 14 or 6.9%) children in America will live with an incarcerated parent by the time they are 18 (Murphey & Cooper, 2015).

Additional Resources:
- What Do I Say About That? (Cook, 2015)
- Wish You Were Here (Youth Communication, 2010)
- My Daddy is in Jail (Bender, 2003)
- Empowering Children of Incarcerated Parents (Burgess, Caselman & Carsey, 2009)
- Full list of books: [https://www.nh.gov/nhdoc/fcc/documents/fccbooklist01.pdf](https://www.nh.gov/nhdoc/fcc/documents/fccbooklist01.pdf)

Focus: Parental Addiction

An estimated 8.7 million (1 in 8 or 12.5%) children in America live in homes with a parent having past year substance use disorder (Lipari & Van Horn, 2017).

Additional Resources:

Focus: Parental Separation/Divorce

17.5 million (1 in 4 or 25%) of children in America have experienced parental separation or divorce (Sacks & Murphey, 2018).

Additional Resources:
- Children & Divorce Information for Parents [https://www.aamft.org/Consumer_Updates/Children_and_Divorce.aspx](https://www.aamft.org/Consumer_Updates/Children_and_Divorce.aspx)
- Creative Interventions for Children of Divorce (Lowenstein, 2006)
Advocacy Mindset

Moving the conversation from “What’s wrong with that child?” to “What happened to that child?” to “What can happen now and who can help the child?”

Tips for School Counselors

- Recognize inequities by race and ethnicity for some ambiguous losses (i.e., parental incarceration & separation)
- Build your cultural competence & understanding of diverse ambiguous loss experiences
- Find ways to identify and support students experiencing loss
- Minimize risks to confidentiality or potential stigma
- Create opportunities for students to talk with and support each other
- Educate other educators about the needs of students coping with loss
- Collaborate with stakeholders
- Advocate for students - microlevel to macrolevel
- Practice self-care & seek supervision/consultation to prevent burnout

Next Steps

- What are your reactions to this information?
- How might you use this information in your work?
- What other approaches or resources do you use to help students cope with ambiguous loss?

Questions?

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References


Conference Announcements

- For all conference related information, download the Conference Yapp App. The Yapp ID is MSCA18.
- Please complete the Workshop Evaluation: http://bit.ly/2pS2YKq
- Please complete the Full Conference Evaluation: http://bit.ly/2yGVzBy
- Support this year’s Annual Project through raffles, bingo, Monday reserved seating, Monday power hour, and service project. Visit the activities desk for additional information.
- Make plans to participate in evening activities:
  - Hospitality from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
  - Service Project Activity beginning at 7:00 p.m.
  - Trivia Night beginning at 7:00 p.m.
  - Dance beginning at 10:00 p.m.
- For more information on MSCA, like us on Facebook (mymsca) and follow us on Twitter (@myMSCA).