Module 9:
The Fact of Loss through Death
Bereavement

The fact of loss through death
Definitions

*Bereavement:* Fact of loss through death.

*Grief:* Emotions associated with bereavement.

*Bereavement Reactions:* Any psychological or physiological response to bereavement.

*Mourning:* The social expressing of grief.

*Anticipatory Grief:* Emotions experienced in anticipation of an impending death.
Bereavement

- 5% of children experience the early death of a parent
- 1,200,000 early parent deaths
- 8 million experience the death of an immediate family member.
Bereavement

- 400,000 child deaths annually
- 30,000 suicides annually
- 7,000-12,000 child victims of parental suicides
Children suffer, not only as innocent victims of war, but also as the bereaved of those lost in battle and through cruel mischance.

Of the many stressors imposed on civilian populations suddenly caught up in the midst of war, perhaps the most grievous is the loss of loved ones.
World Trade Center Disaster
September 11, 2003

It is estimated that adult victims left 2,000 children without a parent.
Principles of Grief

- Grief is a natural reaction to death
- Every death is unique and is experienced differently
- The grieving process is influenced by a number of different factors
- Grief is ongoing
Factors Affecting the Grief Response

- Circumstances of the death
- Previous experiences with death
- Participation in the dying process
- Previous relationship with the deceased
- Psychological/emotional maturity
- Coping and adaptive strategies
- Family/Social support system
Stages of Bereavement

- Acute
- Intermediate
- Long Term Effects
Acute Grief Reactions

- Shock, disbelief, unreality, nightmares
- Oscillation between intrusive reality and denial
- Range of emotions: sad, fearful, angry, helpless
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Social withdrawal
- Regressive behaviors
Acute Grief Reactions

- Decreased concentration
- Diminished capacity for problem solving
- Inability to think about consequence or plan for the future
- Regressive behaviors

- Agitation
- Disorganized behaviors
- Clinging
- Somatic symptoms
- Loss of excretory control
- Nightmares
Acute Grief Reactions

- Somatic symptoms
- Preoccupation with image of the deceased
- Guilt feelings
- Difficulty in performing everyday routines in an organized manner
- Hostility and anger
- Internalizing traits of the deceased

Lindemann, 1944
Intermediate Grief Reactions

- Preoccupation with the image of the deceased
- Bodily symptoms
- Waves of distress
- Yearning
- Work/school problems
- Social withdrawal
- Irritability
- Mood changes
Long Term Reactions

- Decrements in academic performance
- Internalizing and externalizing symptoms
- Somatic/medical symptoms
- Interpersonal and social adjustment problems
- Damages to self-efficacy
- Utilization of health resources
Early Parental Death
In a mother’s love for her child, the world makes a promise that life can never keep.

Romain Gary
Grief and Trauma

- The death of a parent is usually traumatic.
- Traumatic reminders are usually more intrusive and interfere with the child’s mourning process.
- Treat the traumatic stress reactions before grief work.
## Traumatic Stress vs. Bereavement Reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Posttraumatic Stress</th>
<th>Bereavement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive</strong></td>
<td>Focus on death and images of horror</td>
<td>Focus on lost person and images of person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affect</strong></td>
<td>Longing for security/safety</td>
<td>Yearning for lost person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety about threat</td>
<td>Separation anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger, irritability and reminders of threat</td>
<td>Anger (externalizing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numbing</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arousal</strong></td>
<td>Arousal focused on potential further threat</td>
<td>Arousal to scan for lost person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to stimuli with startle reactions</td>
<td>Response to cues of that person</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Raphael (2003)
Childhood Bereavement

- Approximately 4-5% of children will experience the death of a parent before 15 years of age.

- Ratio of parental deaths by gender
  Father : Mother
  2.5 : 1.0
Tasks of Childhood Bereavement

- To cope with the immediate impact of the parental death
- To mourn
- To resume normal everyday activities
Child’s Response to Parent Death

- **Compton**: “Short span of sadness”
- **Wolfenstein**: “Absence of grief”
- **Deutsch**: “Indifference that children display”
- **Blum**: “Obligatory use of denial”
- **Kranzler**: “Less pervasive, more episodic and more situational”
Childhood Bereavement

- Protracted grief is avoided
- Sad feelings are curtailed
- Daily activities are quickly resumed
- There is little weeping
- Little conscious preoccupation with the lost parent
Children’s Immediate Reactions to Parent Death

- Tearfulness
- Anger
- Dysphoria
- Clinging dependency
- Somatic symptoms
- Regressive behaviors
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite disturbances
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest
- Search for blame
Search for Blame: Egocentric Theory of Causality
Children’s Immediate Reactions to Parent Death

- School problems
- Somatic complaints
- Suicidal ideation
- Fear of being alone
- Disruptive behaviors
- Overdependency
- Preoccupation with death
- Anxiety and apprehensions
- Phobic responses
- Exemplary behavior
Childhood Bereavement

- N=38,
- 5-12 Years,
- Females 20; Males 18
- Death of a parent within the last 3-12 weeks
- Instruments:
  - DICA (parent and child forms)

Weller et. Al., 1991
Childhood Bereavement

- N=38,
- 5-12 Years,
- Females 20; Males 18
- Death of a parent within the last 3-12 weeks
- Instruments: DICA (parent and child forms)

Weller et. Al., 1991
## Childhood Bereavement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dysphoria</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitation/retardation</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt/worthlessness</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal ideation</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDD</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</tbody>
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Weller, 1991
Childhood Bereavement

- N = 25, 2-10 years, 8 girls, 17 boys
- Father death
- 42 month follow-up
  - 2/3 manifested psychological/behavioral problems
    - Clinging/dependency
    - Learning problems
    - Anxiety/Inhibited behaviors
    - Aggressive behaviors

Elizur & Kaffman, 1982, 1983
Suicide Bereaved Children

n=26, 5-17 years, 85% Father suicide

Anxiety ➔ Anger ➔ Shame

• Less accepting of the death
• No more likely to experience PTSD, suicidality, depression or impairment in psychosocial functioning
• SB families did less together before and after parental death

Cerel et al, JAACAP, 1999
Preschool Child

- Regressive behaviors
- Somatic symptoms
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Clinging/dependency behaviors
- Inattention
- Anxiety
School-Aged Child

- Academic and learning problems
- Somatic complains
- Anxiety/dysphoria
- Social withdrawal
- Externalizing symptoms
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
Adolescent

- Sadness/dysphorias
- Somatic symptoms
- Identity conflicts
- Social alienation
- Anxiety
- Personality trait disturbances
- Externalizing symptoms
Assessment

- Circumstances of death:
  - What did the child witness
  - What does the child know
- Relationship to the parent
- Current caregiver
- Family/social supports
- Family response to the death
- Child’s functioning
Treatment Goals

- Provide safe place
- Facilitate acceptance of death
- Clarify meaning of trauma/loss
- Facilitate Bereavement process
- Support new attachments/adjustments
- Clarify cognitive distortions
  - Egocentric theories of causality
- Identify affects, traumatic reminders and loss reminders
Treatment Goals

- Resolve ambivalent feelings
  - Positive memories
  - Negative memories
  - Loss of what may have been
- Restoring developmental lines
- Commitment to new relationships
Interventions

- Psychodynamic/play therapies
- CBT traumatic grief focused therapies
  - Cohen et al
- CBT group based treatment of traumatically bereaved adolescents
  - Pynoos et al
Long-term Effects of Early Parental Death
Childhood Bereavement

There is considerable evidence of an association between early parent death, childhood disturbance, and adult psychiatric disorders.
Childhood Bereavement

- N=26, 3-6 Years; matched to 40 controls
- More scared and less happy
- Child Behavior Checklist
  - **Boys**: Higher on total symptoms scores, and externalizing and internalizing symptoms
  - **Girls**: Rated higher on internalizing symptoms

Kranzler 1989, JAACAP
Long Term Effects of Early Parental Death

George Brown, 1977

“Orphan’s Syndrome”

• Vulnerability to later losses
• Depression
• Readiness to experience helplessness
• Readiness to experience abandonment
• Little confidence in one’s adaptive capacities
### Long Term Effects of Parental Death

Felix Brown, 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parental Death %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depressed patients</strong></td>
<td>216 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surgical patients</strong></td>
<td>267 (19.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Average</strong></td>
<td>(12%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Long Term Effects of Parental Death

Aaron Beck, 1963

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parental Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Depressed</td>
<td>100 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Depression</td>
<td>100 (12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effects of Early Parental Death

ECA STUDY

Subjects identified as experiencing maternal death before 10 years of age

- Risk for agoraphobia with panic attacks (OR 6.9)
- Risk for simple phobias (or 1.6)

Tweed et al., 1989
Long Term Effects Childhood Bereavement

- N=90 (58 deaths, 32 separations)
- 77% Psychiatric Disorder
  - 82% Depressive Disorders
- Age, Sex, Type of loss, failed to distinguish between the two groups
- **Mental disorder** was associated with
  - Depression, Anxiety
  - Increased Cortisol and B-endorphins
  - Non-supportive relationship with remaining parent
  - Poor peer relationships

Brier
Complicated Grief Disorder

Symptomatology lasting over 14 months

• Intense intrusive thoughts/memories
• Pangs of severe emotion
• Distressing yearnings
• Feeling excessively alone and empty
• Avoiding tasks reminiscent of the deceased
• Sleep disturbance
• Loss of interest in personal activities

Horowitz 1997, AJP 154: 904-910