

Grief Through the Life-Cycle

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Goals

1. Understand how orientation toward death changes through the life-cycle
2. Discuss how development affects mourning
3. Describe developmentally expected loss and indicate the ways unexpected loss complicates grief
4. Discuss interventive techniques at each stage of the life-cycle

Loss through the Lifecycle

Three Critical Concepts

- Developmental Level
- Developmental Expectation
- Other Variables
 - Culture
 - Gender or Style

Developmental Perspectives on Death


Developmental Levels

- Throughout life, our orientation toward death changes

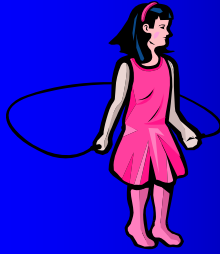
Recognition
Realization
Reconciliation

The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies

- The myth of children and loss



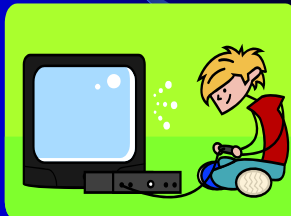
Children Historically Dealt with Death and Loss



- Fairy Tales
- Games
- Books and Stories
- Jokes
- Songs

Children Are Constantly Exposed to Death Now

- Television
- News
- Movies
- Video Games
- Life Experiences



Death Images and Children

- Kastenbaum notes that children now are *habitualized* to death
- That means that violent images are so widespread, it takes much more to shock



Yet, Children Are Constantly Developing

- Cognitively
- Emotionally
- Socially
- Spiritually



Young Children



- Animistic
- Artificialistic
- Blur boundaries between life and death
- Yet, "all gone" an early concept

Children Develop in Their Cognitive Mastery of Death

Conceptualizing Death

- Universality
 - All encompassing
 - Inevitable
 - Unpredictable
 - Nonfunctionality
 - Irreversibility
 - Causality
 - Continuation
- (Brent and Speece)



Young Children Have a Short Feeling Span



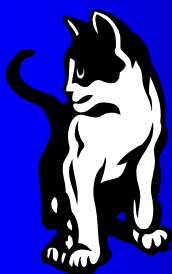
- They can sustain intense emotions for a short time (Crenshaw)
- Implications for counseling

Children Develop Socially

- Cooley's Play and Game Stage
- The Development of Empathy




Children as Spiritual Pioneers



R. Coles, *The Spiritual Lives of Children*

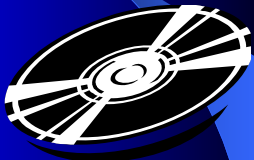
Development Continues Through Adolescence

- Young
- Middle
- Old




Death is a Significant Undercurrent in Adolescence

- The Three "I's" – Independence, Identity, Intimacy
- Time of critical evaluation
- Significant separations
- Problematic experiences of death
- Defended against by present orientation




Early Adulthood

- Focused on Externals
- Yet, Spirituality and Mate Selection
- Child-Raising and Spiritual Values



Middle Adulthood


The Awareness of Mortality



- Death of Parents
- Evidence of Aging
- Death of Peers
- The Additive Effect
 - 40 + 40 = 80
 - 55 + 55 = 110


The Awareness of Mortality

Implications



- Rise in Death Anxiety
- Preparation for Death
- Concern for Health
- Renewed Zest in Life
- Re-evaluation of Priorities
- Renewed Spirituality

Awareness of Mortality



“To suspect you are mortal is the beginning of terror; to know beyond doubt that you are mortal is the end of terror.”
F. Herbert

The Awareness of Finitude

- As individuals move into later life, they begin to acknowledge the closeness of death
- Language
- This creates both a need to make sense of life and death

(Marshall)



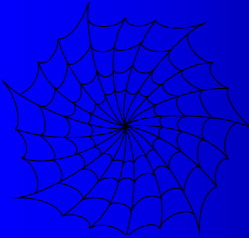
The Paradox

Older adults may want and need to talk about death just at the time it is most difficult for their adult children

Understanding the Grieving Process

Loss and Grief in Children and Adolescence

Children Are Embedded in Webs of Relationships



- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Teachers
- Coaches
- School
- Faith Communities

Children Experience Many Losses

- Death
- Divorce
- Separation
- Loss of Dreams
- Relocation

Some Losses May Be Catastrophic

- Abandonment
- Foster Care Placement
- Fire, Disaster
- Homelessness, Eviction, Rapid Relocation

At What Age Can Children Mourn?

- With object constancy (around 3 years-old)
- Only with adolescent development of identity



Worden's Answer

Children mourn at any age – but different from adults

My Comment


Children mourn at any age – but
different from and similar to adults

Grief May Be Manifested in Many Ways

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Cognitively
- Spiritually
- Behaviorally

The Grief Process

A Roller Coaster of Reactions



Grief is a very individual reaction

The need to assess

Assessing Grief

- The nature of the relationship
- The nature of the attachment
- Circumstances of the loss
- Personality and history of the individual
- Social support
- Concurrent stresses
- Health and coping abilities

Grief is not a time-bound process that ends in detachment

Amelioration

- Intensity of grief reactions diminish
- Individuals function as well as they did (sometimes better) prior to the loss
- Yet, grief has a developmental effect

Yet, there are also differences

- Early loss and the crisis of impending connection (Crenshaw)
- Manifestations may include acting out, sleep disturbances, regressive behaviors, accidents, changes in behavior or grades
- Children may re-grieve earlier losses



Children and Adolescent Grief



- Thus children and adolescents may experience periods of grief throughout the life-cycle
- In early loss, the *re-grief* phenomenon
 - As the struggle with identity
 - Developmental surges

Grief takes place in a family context

The Harvard Bereavement Study isolated a number of risk factors for both the child and the family. *Yet, these are best summarized as the best predictor of the child's adjustment is the ability of the surviving parent to function.*

Adolescents Often Experience Difficulty as They Grief

- Discomfort with differences
- Ability to seek support from adults
- Limits to peer support
- Time of spiritual questioning

Adolescent Grief

- Acting Out (including behaviors, substance abuse, sexual, eating disorders)
- School Performance
- Changes – Yet, Note Development
- Self-Esteem
- Anxiety




Adolescent Grief

The Internet as Support

- Technology as difference
- Adolescents as *Digital Natives* (rather than *Digital Immigrants*)
- 93 % use the Internet, 79 % of 15-17 year-olds have cell phones
- Prevalence of *MySpace* and *Facebook*


Adolescents and the Internet

- The Internet allows experimentation with different personas
- Internet relationships can offer a sense of belonging
- The Internet can offer the possibility of validation without risk
- The Internet offers information independent of asking adults



Adolescent Grief

The Internet as Support



- The Internet offers information about grief
- There are opportunities to memorialize online
- One can express grief to peers and others in blogs
- One can offer and receive support including in online support groups

The Internet and Adolescent Grief Support



Points for the Counselor

1. Ask adolescents about the Internet and if and how they are using it as they cope with their grief
2. Create an ongoing dialogue about their Internet use

Grief in Adulthood



- Developmentally expected losses
- The trauma of developmentally unexpected loss

Perinatal Loss



- A potential loss for adolescents and young adults
- Disenfranchised grief and perinatal loss – emerging awareness of loss for mothers, continued disenfranchisement for fathers, siblings and others


The Loss of a Child *The Unanticipated Trauma*

- Reality – unreality of loss
- Affective issues of injustice, guilt, anger
- Adjusting to a world
 - Impaired system
 - The myth of divorce
 - The child and relations with others
- The issue of meaning
- Spiritual distress



The Death of a Parent

- Filial maturity, generational stakes, the ongoing connections between parents and children
- Potentially the first significant loss
- Developmental push
- Awareness of mortality
- Secondary losses – family relationships and family rituals, places
- Children and grandparent loss
- The issue of inheritance



Developmental Expectations *Older Persons*



“We exist as on a battlefield – amidst the dead and dying”
Muriel Sparks, *Momento Mori*

Older Persons May Experience Unique Issues as They Face Death

- The lack or limits of a primary caregiver
 - Implications for hospice and discharge planning
- Age, ageism and ethics
 - Would you make the decision if the patient were younger?

Loss is a Significant Issue in Later Life

- Intangible Losses
- Tangible Losses

Significant Losses in Later Life

- Death of Peers
- Death of Siblings
- Death of Spouse

Death of a Sibling

- Kin – yet peer
- Identity
- Loss of continuity of perception and memory

The death of a spouse or life partner can have a profound impact in later life

The death of a spouse or life partner can endanger the precarious balance between the older person and his or her environment

Older Spouses

Psychological and Physical Morbidity


- Significantly higher rates of depression at 6 and 12 months
- Significantly higher rates of anxiety
- Significantly higher rates of Cardio-Vascular Disease
- Mediated by strong social support, spirituality and a sense of meaning and purpose

Williams

Possible Health Effects

can be pronounced in older widows


- Joint unfavorable environment
- Stress of grief
- Changes in lifestyle or adherence to regimen




Age is both a facilitating and complicating factor in grief

Illustration:
Older Widows
Facilitating Factors

- Society of Widows
- Experience with Grief
- Awareness of Finitude




Older Widows
Complicating Factors (3 F's)



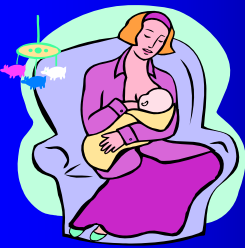
- Frailty
- Finances
- Family and Friends (Isolation and Multiple Loss)

Widowers

- The myth of early research
- Strengths include finances, ability to purchase services, opportunity for replacement/remarriage
- Weakness –wife as keeper of kin



Sensitivity to Grief in Persons with Dementia



- Validation Therapy
- Mrs. J and her lost babies

How to Help

Counseling Individuals

The Tasks of Grief

- Acknowledge the loss
- Express manifest and latent emotion
- Adjust to a changed life
- Relocate the loss
- Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss

Worden (Modified)

Let individuals utilize their historic strengths

Empower Natural Support Systems

Through the Life-Cycle

Effective Support for Children

The Value of Family Centered Counseling



- Provide Support for Parents
 - Process their grief
 - Skill-building including teaching them how to assist their children with secondary loss
- Provide Support for Children
 - Grief support
 - Adjusting to a new life


Schools Can Play a Critical Role



- Academic
- Social and Developmental Arena
- Sources of Formal and Informal Support
- “Early Warning” System
- Links Families

Empowering Adults

- Grief in the College Environment
- Grief in the Workplace – Training and Advocacy
- Empowering Faith Communities
- Offering Support in Nursing Homes and Assisted-Living Facilities



Support Groups


- Validation
- Ventilation
- Respite and Support
- Learn Coping Techniques

Specialized Techniques

Use in prescriptive and developmentally appropriate ways


The Value of Expressive Approaches

- Natural
- Cathartic
- Reflective
- Projective




The Value of Bibliotherapy

- Validation
- Suggestions for Coping
- Hope



Corr's Guidelines for Bibliotherapy




- Read and evaluate the book
- Select appropriate title for capability and context
- Cope with limitations
- Discuss with client

The Importance of Life Review and Reminiscence

Meaning – Making at the end-of-life

The Value of Ritual



- Liminal
- Bridge to Spirituality and Culture
- Family Centered
- The Value of "Doing"

Illustration: Children and Funerals

- Importance of Ritual – including Spiritual
- Value of Personalization and Participation
- Choice
 - Information
 - Options
 - Support



The Central Point

Loss and Life
The Price of Love
