

Supporting Bereaved Youth

Providence At Home with Compassus'
Safe Crossings Program

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Program Overview and Services

- Providence at Home with Compassus' Pediatric Grief Support Program
- We serve any grieving child or teen requesting grief support in King and Pierce Counties
- All services are at no cost to families, this is possible through generous donations from the community
- Direct family and youth grief support
 - Anticipatory Support
 - Bereavement Support
- Consultation with caregivers and community professionals
- School Group Curriculum and Supplies
- Events
- Camp Erin
- Community and Professional Trainings

Overview

Understanding Childhood Grief

What Does Grief Look Like in Youth?

Developmental Considerations

Talking to Youth About Death and Grief

Saying Goodbye, Viewing the Body, and Funerals

Traumatic and Disenfranchised Losses

Cultural Considerations

Caring for the Caregiver

Resources

School Group Curriculum

Case Examples

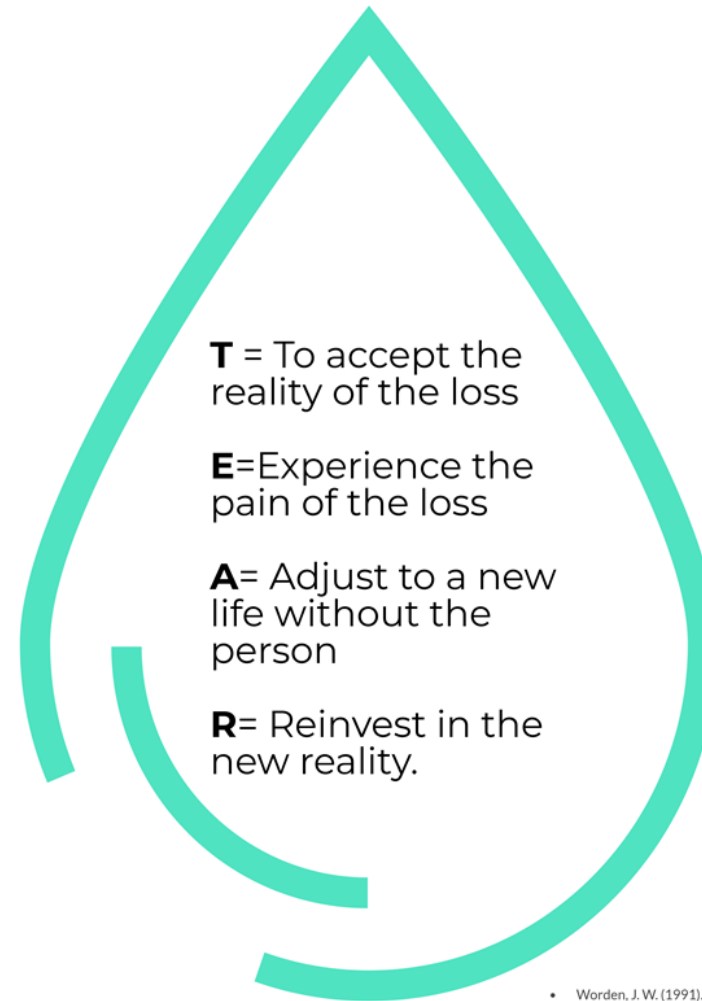
SCP Consults and Referral Process

Understanding Childhood Grief

- Childhood grief is markedly different than adult grief
- People of all ages experience grief
 - “If you’re old enough to love, you’re old enough to grieve”
- Grieving youth also have the same needs as all children, this includes a need for structure, boundaries, and knowing what to expect
- Youth often have gaps in understanding when it comes to death and grief
- As adults, we may need to identify and fill those gaps, helping youth understand their grief and validate it as a normal reaction to death
- Youth tend to have short windows in which they express grief (sometimes called grief bursts)
- Youth often haven’t absorbed the taboos culture can communicate about talking about death
- As a result, they may talk openly and casually about death
- We can reduce communicating stigma and taboo by being open and supportive when a child or teen chooses to talk to us about grief

William Worden's Tasks of Bereavement

TEAR Model Of Grief



Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

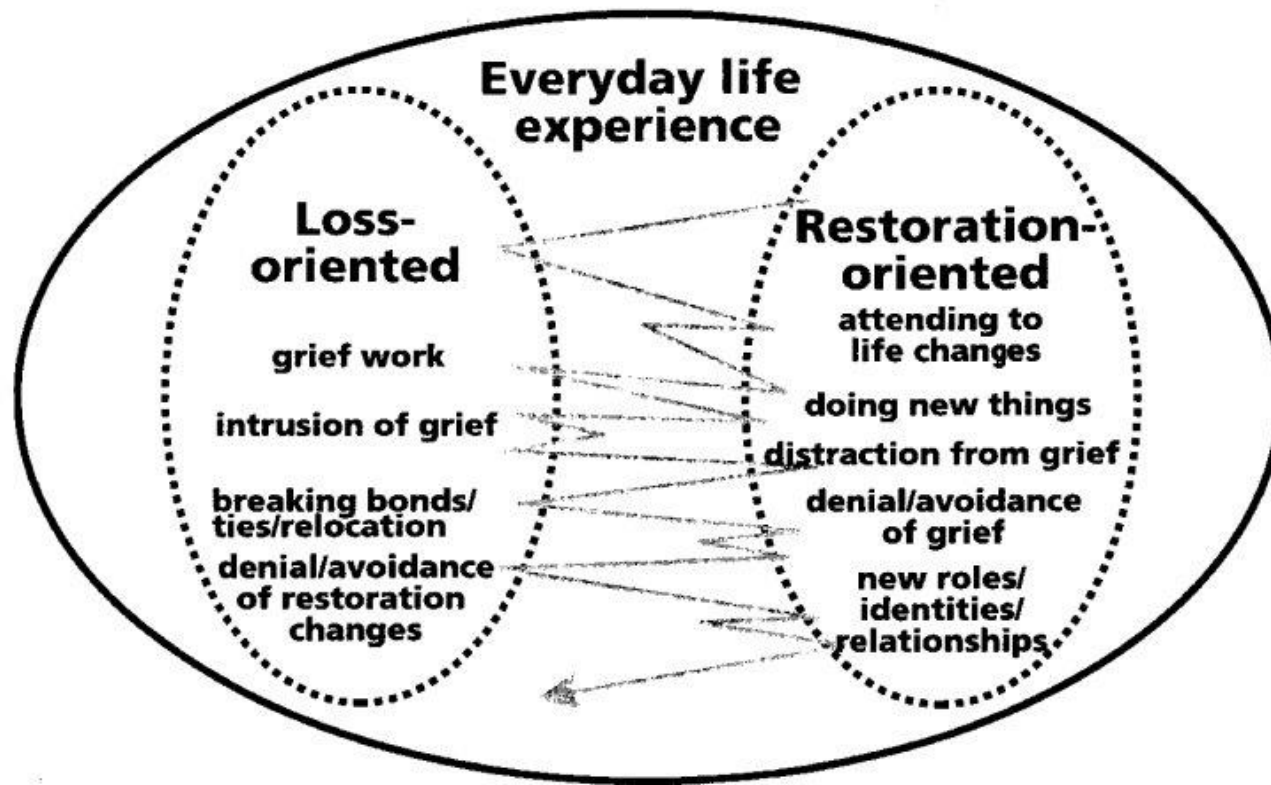


FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

Dual Process Model

Stroebe and Schut (1999)

Highlights the need to oscillate between loss orientation and restoration orientation

Can sometimes look like approach coping vs avoidant coping

Practice Model for Supporting Bereaved Youth

1. Processing the circumstances or event within the context of their developmental ability
2. Understanding the concept of grief
3. Identifying and understanding feelings and behaviors associated with normal grief responses
4. Identifying and practicing healthy ways of coping
5. Honoring the relationship and establishing continuing bonds
6. Identifying and accessing support systems

Common Grief Reactions

- Emotional Responses
 - Sadness, Anger, Confusion, Relief, Guilt, Fear
- Somatic Symptoms
 - Headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, appetite changes, body tension
- Behavioral Changes
 - Outbursts, regressive behaviors, bed wetting, defiance, telling the story over and over, difficulty separating from caregivers
- Cognitive Changes
 - Difficulty focusing, memory impairment, sense of unreality, anhedonia
- Questioning Spiritual Beliefs

Newborns
(Ages 0-2)

Preschoolers
(Ages 2-4)

Early
Elementary
(Ages 4-7)

Upper
Elementary
(Ages 7-12)

Teens
(Ages 12-18)

Grief Reactions Across Developmental Stages

Later Elementary

Characteristics

- Morbid curiosity
- Desire for complete detail
- Wish to "fit in"
- More socially aware and concerned with how they and others should be responding to death
- May desire privacy and not want information shared

Ways to Support

- Encourage and validate healthy expression of feelings
- Provide physical outlets for grief expression
- Be available, and allow for alone time
- Consult with them about what and how they'd like information to be shared
- Talk about the person who died
- Answer questions fully
- Offer many opportunities for choice and control

Adolescence

Characteristics

- Have more complex understanding of death and loss
- Experience an emotional struggle between independence and dependence
- More likely to talk with someone outside the family
- May demonstrate grief through physical or behavioral expressions

Ways to Support

- Encourage and validate healthy expression of feelings
- Be available and listen with openness
- Do not try to take away their grief
- Recognize and affirm the need for time alone and with peers

Question Break



Talking to Children about Death and Grief

- **It is normal for adults to:**
 - Want to protect children
 - Worry about how youth will be affected by their emotions
 - Be concerned about the effect death will have on the youth
 - Be unsure of the youth's ability to understand what is happening
 - Receive mixed advice from others
- **However, without good information youth may:**
 - Intuit that something has changed
 - Interpret body language, stress & tone of voice
 - Become overly concerned or anxious
 - Overhear confusing conversations
 - Imagine a situation to be different than it is in actuality

Talking about Death

- Share accurate information in developmentally appropriate language
 - Use the concrete terms – dead, died, body stopped working, when a body stops working it can't start working again
 - Avoid euphemisms like "passed away", "lost them"
- Give choice, follow their lead, and allow them to change their mind when possible
 - Sibling may make different choices
 - If struggling to decide, provide options
- Questions are normal and should be encouraged
 - It is okay if you don't have the answer. Be honest about that. If it is something you can get the answer to, let them know you will find out and get back to them. If it is unanswerable, name that and validate that you have that question too and it is hard to not have an answer
- Grief is normal, it is not something that needs to be fixed
- Avoid making statements or promises that aren't true, this damages trust and can increase anxiety
- The three "C"s
 - Did I cause it?
 - Can I catch it?
 - Who will care for me?

Saying Goodbye, Viewing the Body, & Funerals

- As much as possible, give information, choice, and opportunities to change their mind
 - It is normal for children to make different choices than siblings
 - Give examples of options if a child appears to be struggling to decide
- If possible, have the child have a designated support person at the funeral who isn't acutely grieving
- Talking about/viewing the body
 - Viewing the body can be helpful to children if they're appropriately prepared and given choice
 - Let the child's questions lead sharing
 - May ask about what happens to the body, can explain this in developmentally appropriate terms
- Example: A parent is in the hospital after an accident and will soon be taken off from life support. A caregiver can explain to the youth what is happening and give them choice if they would like to visit and say goodbye. This includes explaining to the child what the person looks like, what noises and smells they would experience, and that their person won't be able to respond to them but can likely hear them. Of course, the family should be leading if they are open to giving this choice.

Traumatic Loss

- Losses may be traumatic due to:
 - the cause of death (sudden, unexpected, violent)
 - circumstances surrounding the death
 - the relationship to the person who died
- In addition to grieving the traumatic loss, the youth may have also experienced the traumatic event that caused the death (car accident, natural disaster, other accident)
 - If media attention, youth may also have to cope with their experience being very public
- Caregivers may be more hesitant to be honest about how a person died if it was a stigmatized loss (suicide, homicide, substance related)
 - Child will learn how their person died eventually, better to hear in a supportive environment
- Trauma symptoms may be present in addition to grief reactions
 - Traumatic remembering
 - Dissociative symptoms
 - Intense avoidance of reminders
- May lead to more complex grief reactions
 - Strong feelings of guilt or focus on what they could have done to change what happened

Disenfranchised Losses

- Losses that aren't validated by environmental context
- Examples
 - Bio parents whom a child hasn't lived with/spent much time with
 - Teachers
 - Step siblings, half siblings, siblings that didn't grow up together
 - Grandparents who served in a primary caregiver role for a child
 - Ex's
 - Traumatic losses
- Can be more stigmatized
- Interventions
 - Focus on validating the loss
 - Educate about disenfranchised loss
 - Explore and normalize ways they've been impacted
 - Make space for sharing their loss narrative at their own pace

Secondary Losses

- Other losses that are triggered by the death loss
- Examples include:
 - Changes in caregivers, routine, or how often they see half siblings.
 - Moving schools, homes, and/or regions.
 - Lifestyle changes due to a change in family income.
 - Having to get rid of a pet.
- Grief from secondary losses is just as valid as grief from death losses. Create space for both.

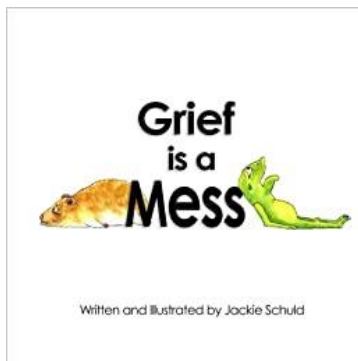
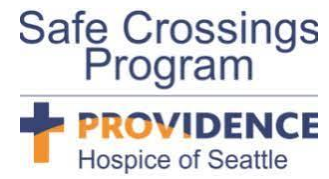
Cultural Considerations

- Cultural humility
- Families/students are the experts on their experience and support needs
- Death rituals vary significantly across cultures and belief systems
- Every grief experience is unique
- There's no correct way to grieve
- Continuing bonds
- We provide information that should then be filtered through each unique family's lens to what fits for them

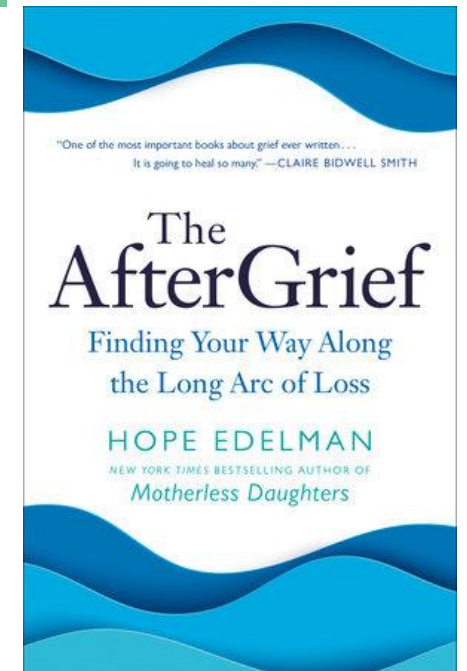
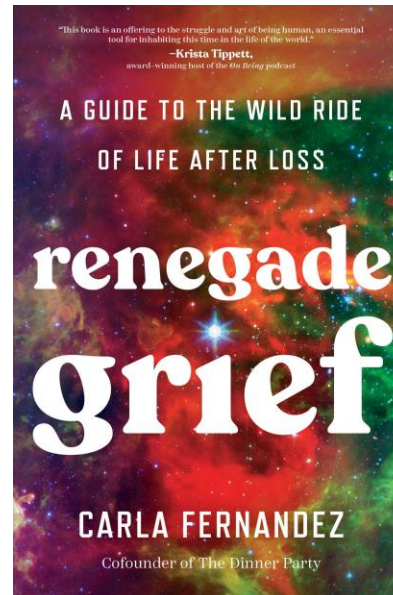
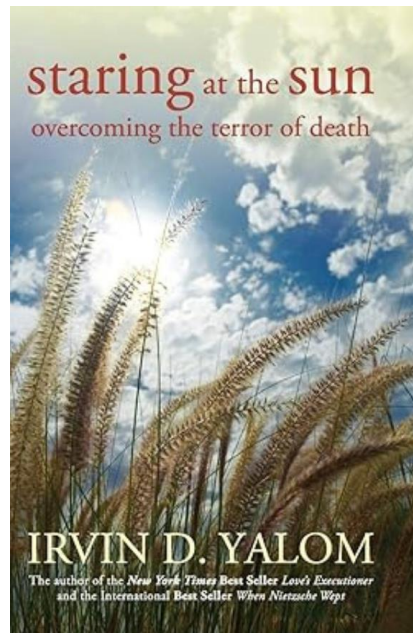
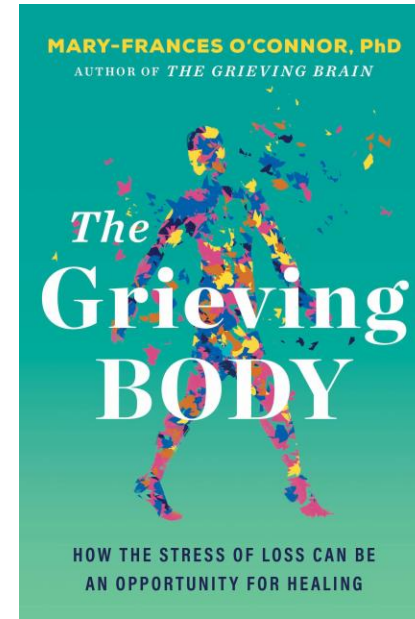
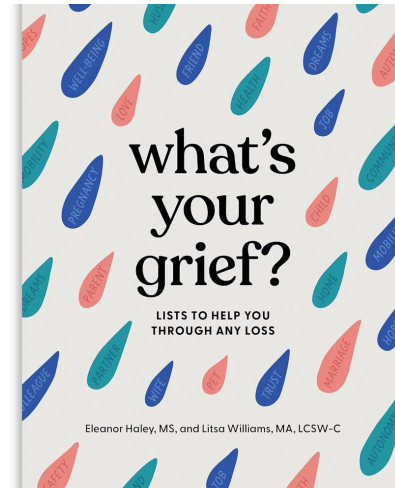
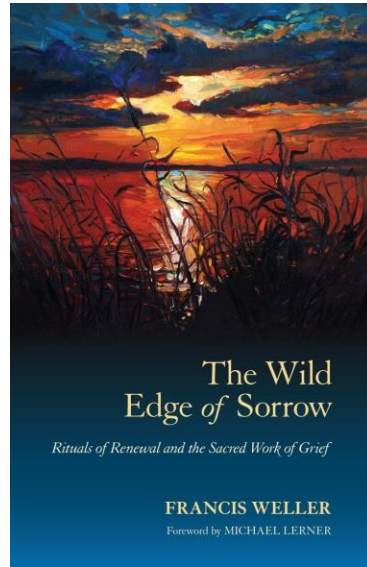
Caring for the Caregivers

- In order to provide youth the support they need, we must be taking care of ourselves.
- It is okay (and important) to take the time and space we need.
- It is okay to express grief in front of youth. This can be helpful modeling. A general rule of thumb is to make sure you are not crying harder than the child.
- Children crave a sense of “normalcy”, especially at school. Maintain structure, with options for getting support when needed.

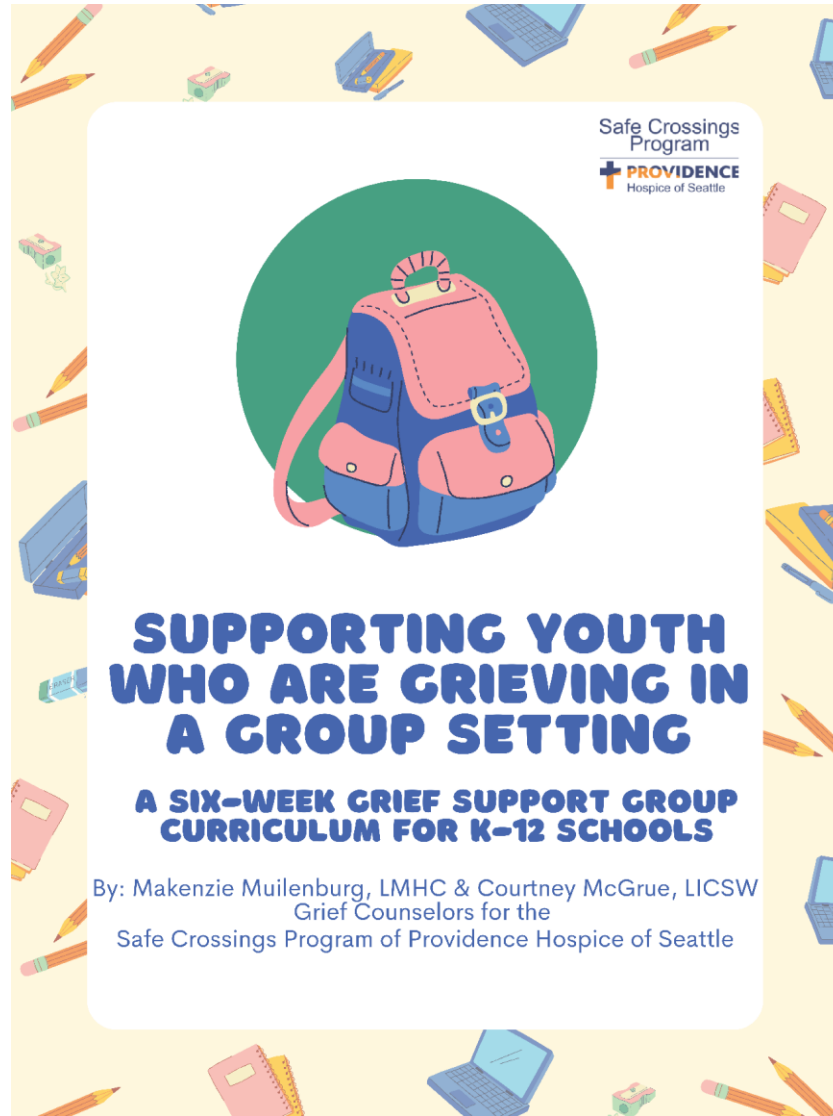
Resources



General Grief Literature



School Groups



- Six-week grief group curriculum available to school counselors and school social workers
- We can connect you to supplies for the group
- Phone consultation available throughout the group
- Two versions, one for elementary school and another for middle/high school

Safe Crossings Referral Process

- Safe Crossings Counselors are available to provide consultation and/or direct grief counseling to youth
- School, home, and telehealth visits are available
- Referral process
 - If you'd like us to reach out to a family, make sure to get permission from the family first
- Contact Makenzie Muilenburg at 206-445-8980 or email Makenzie.Muilenburg@compassus.com

Q&A

