

WHEN TREATMENT HAS FAILED
DEALING WITH END OF LIFE ISSUES
AND DEATH OF A CHILD

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Children's grief - role of the teacher

- What is your role with the dying child?
 - What is your role with the siblings?
 - What is your role with parents?
 - What role do you play in the lives of friends, classmates, other children affected?
 - When a child has died, what role do you play in the lives of all these people associated with that child?
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Teacher's role is many - faceted

Normal Grief – J. William Worden

- Feelings
 - Physical Sensations
 - Cognitions
 - Behaviours
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Feelings

- Sadness
 - Anger
 - Guilt and self reproach
 - Anxiety
 - Loneliness
 - Fatigue
 - Helplessness
 - shock
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Feelings

- Yearning
 - Relief
 - Emancipation
 - Numbness
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Physical sensations

- Hollowness in the stomach
 - Tightness in the chest
 - Tightness in the throat
 - Oversensitivity to noise
 - A sense of depersonalisation
 - Breathlessness, feeling short of breath
 - Weakness in the muscles
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Physical sensations

- Lack of energy
 - Dry mouth
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Cognitions

- Disbelief
 - Confusion
 - Preoccupation
 - Sense of presence
 - Hallucinations
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Behaviours

- Sleep disturbance
 - Appetite disturbance
 - Absentminded behaviour
 - Social withdrawal
 - Dream of the deceased
 - Avoiding reminders of the deceased
 - Searching and calling out
 - Sighing
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Behaviours

- Crying
 - Visiting places or carrying objects that belonged to the deceased
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Spiritual

- Meaning of life
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Normal grief

- The acute phase of grief can last up to six months
- The grief experience can be strongly felt for up to one or two years
- One never completely gets over their grief experiences

Children's concept of death – Charles Corr

- Universality
- Irreversibility
- Nonfunctionality
- Causality
- Some type of continued life form

Complicated grief

- Intense and enduring grief responses
- Rarely diagnosed prior to six months following loss
- Runs along same continuum as acute grief
- Distinguished on basis of severity and duration
- Person overwhelmed to point where grief interferes with normal functioning

Complicated grief

- Feelings of isolation
- Withdrawal from previous social interactions
- Somatic complaints
- Maladaptive behaviour
- No progression of the mourning process
- Depression

Complicated grief

- Generalised anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Persistent guilt and low self esteem
- Masked grief
- Minor event triggers intense grief reaction
- Persistent difficulty discussing the dead person

Complicated grief

- Aggressive behaviour
- Ongoing sleeping difficulties
- Marked eating disturbance
- School difficulties or significant academic reversal

How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

Factors requiring consideration

- Legal constraints and school policies
 - Professional boundaries
 - Developmental capacity
 - Individual differences
 - Cultural background
 - Religious beliefs
 - Family history and belief system
 - Parental wishes
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- Teachers provide a constant, reassuring and predictable presence for the child.
 - They can provide the child with opportunities to express feelings and thoughts through discussion, art, story making, storytelling, clay, etc.
 - Assist rather than encumber the child in the grief process.
 - Take opportunities in class to teach that grief and loss is a natural part of life. The child's grieving process will take patience and understanding
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- Don't attempt to fix things. This is a process they need to journey through.
 - When answering questions maintain a balance between listening and not overexplaining.
 - For older children the peer group is vital.
 - Be aware of opportunities to work with parents and the health system to organise a meeting with the child and his/her class. This encourages their support, education and increases sensitisation towards the child.
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- Answer questions honestly.
 - Be aware that grief will have an impact on the learning process.
 - Establish ties with parents so that each of you informs the other about important developments in the child's life as they occur.
 - Be aware of manifestations of guilt
 - Follow a schedule that reflects a normal routine.
 - The child may have a greater need for attention
 - Delay standardized tests at this time of acute loss.
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- Watch for changes in classwork and behaviour. Child may have difficulty concentrating. This may indicate a need for special support.
 - Allow child to have time alone if required.
 - The provision of death education programmes as part of a preventative approach may lessen the associated fear and anxiety as well as improving communication and coping strategies.
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- It can be helpful to send relevant class material home so that child can discuss it with the family.
 - Never force a child to deal with emotional issues, Should always be discussed voluntarily.
 - Maintain contact with the dying child through visits, letters, email and phone calls.
 - Staff development programmes re death education.
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How teachers can assist the child in the grief process

- Where practicable, it is beneficial for classmates to be informed re the dying child's state of health.
 - School is a great source of support and hope for the grieving child.
 - School can enable the dying child to reach his or her developmental capacities and to achieve a sense of completion.
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Take care of yourself

Further Reading

- Schonfield, D.J., 1993, *Talking with Children About Death*, Journal of Pediatric Health Care
 - Resource sheet:
 - Tasks of Mourning (David Crenshaw)
 - Characteristics of Age Groups (National Association for Loss and Grief)
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