

Supporting children, young people and families facing bereavement and loss

Educational Psychology Service

Early Help Webinar

May 2020

Definition....





There are as many ways to react to loss and grief as there are children in the world
Child Bereavement UK

Principles



- Grief is a normal reaction to loss.
- Most children do not need grief counselling but need support.
- Children are active in constructing their recovery from loss, which is unique to each young person.
- Grief does not go away, it is forever.
- Losses as valid and legitimate
- A knowledge base of loss and bereavement is empowering to those giving support.

How children make sense of what has happened will depend on....



- Circumstances of the death/dying
- Relationship with the person who died
- The individual, developmental age, personality, background
- Support environment

Complicating factors around bereavement due to COVID-19



- Unpredictability
- Suddenness
- Distance
- Fear
- Separation
- Support Structures
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Lack of specialness
- Constantly reminded
- Lack of rituals

Developmental Thinking

Growing Up



How do children grieve?

Puddle Jumping

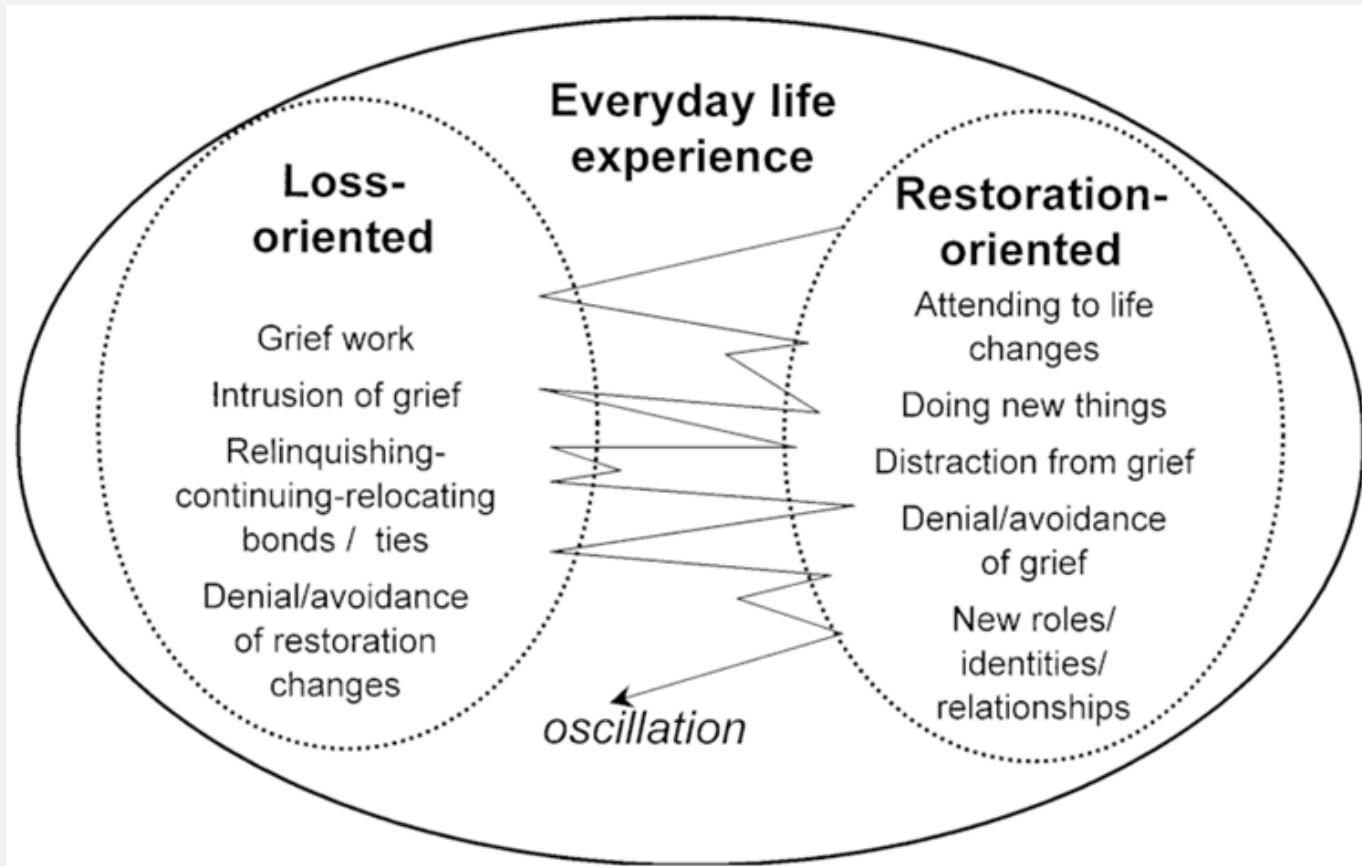


The grieving process

Upward spiral of grief



The Dual Process Model



How might a child or young person react



- Distress, anger, shock, guilt
- Show feelings in their behaviour
- Questions
- No reaction at all
- Anxiety or Insecurity
- Confusion..How?..Why?
- Protective of others
- Feelings of Responsibility..Guilt?

What helps grieving children?



- Clear, honest and age-appropriate information
- Reassurance that they are not to blame and that different feelings are ok
- Normal routines and a clear demonstration that important adults are there for them
- Time to talk about what has happened, ask questions and have them answered even when repeated.
- To explore feelings through play, drawing, painting
- Opportunities to remember
- Being listened to and given time to grieve in their own way

How to communicate with bereaved children



In the first instance:

- Acknowledge what has happened
- Express support
- Understand and follow family's lead on the narrative
- Discuss how to share the news, if appropriate

How to communicate with bereaved children?



- Answer questions honestly and in simple language
- Be prepared to give repeated explanations
- Give the message that all feelings are ok and help to think about safe ways to manage difficult feelings
- Model to children it is ok to be upset, through being open and expressive with your own feelings

Supporting families to manage grief in lockdown



- Stay connected to friends and family
- Feel connected to nature
- Capture memories
- Express gratitude

Things to avoid



- **platitudes**, “Don’t get upset, it’ll be alright”
- **relating your own losses**, “Yes I remember when my mother died, I felt ...”
- **overcompensating**, “No, don’t ask her to do that, she’s been through such a lot, the poor child”
- **changing the subject**, “Try not to think about it, now how about if you got on with ...”
- **minimising the loss**, “Yes, I know your not seeing your friends but it is not the end of the world”
- **telling the child what they should feel**, “I know you’re upset now but you’ll soon feel better”
- **Euphemisms**

The challenge in working remotely

Relating A way of being



In working with grieving families we all bring our own:



- Hurts and losses
- Feelings about loss by death
- Desire to care for others
- Ability to reach out and involve ourselves
- Inability, when overpowered by the tragedy of sudden death and our own sadness

Looking after yourself



- Accept your need for support, both practical and emotional
- Be aware of what support is available to you
- Establish who is going provide this
- Take responsibility for asking for what you need

Sources of support



- **Child Bereavement UK**
<https://childbereavementuk.org/>
- **Winston's Wish**
<https://www.winstonswish.org/>
- **Grief Encounter**
<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>
- **CRUSE**
<https://www.cruse.org.uk>