

*The Caring House*  
Caring for Life

# Supporting Children and Teens Through Loss

**FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHOPS:  
MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS Breakout Session  
April 4, 2022**

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# Supporting Children & Teens through Loss



## SESSION GOALS

- Gain greater understanding of loss and grief including:
  - Examples of different types of loss for kids
  - What grief may look like in children
  
- Learn tips and considerations for supporting children with loss
  
- Identify resources and community support available

# Loss, Grief and Mourning



**Loss** is no longer having something or someone, or having less of something or someone

## **LOSS LEADS TO GRIEF AND MOURNING**

**Grief** (internal) is a natural response to loss. Grief may be thoughts and feelings that accompany loss. It may be physical, cognitive, and spiritual, as well.

**Mourning** (external) includes actions and words in response to grief and loss.

# Example of Losses Experienced that Lead to Grief



Absence of a significant person

Separation (Divorce, Incarceration, Hospitalizations)

Loss / changes related as a result of illness, accident or crisis

Moving Cities, Moving Schools, Moving neighborhoods

Loss of routine

Loss of independence

Isolation

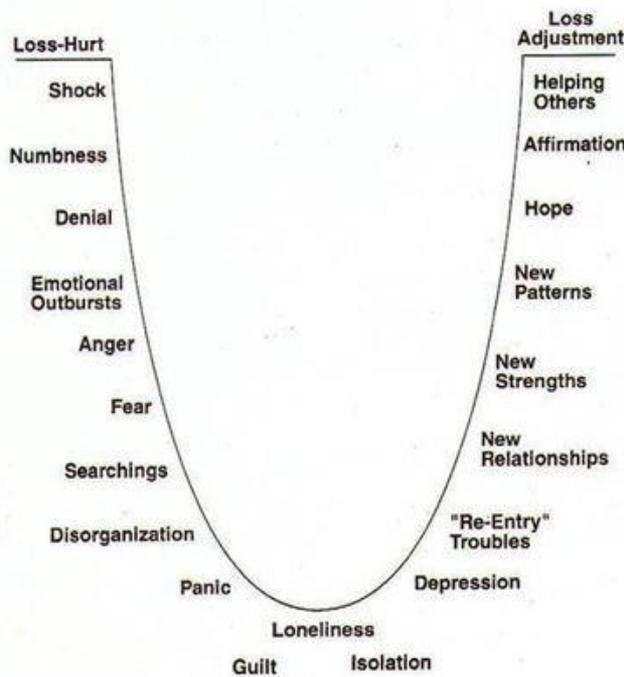
Loss of sense of safety & security

Loss of a dream or hope

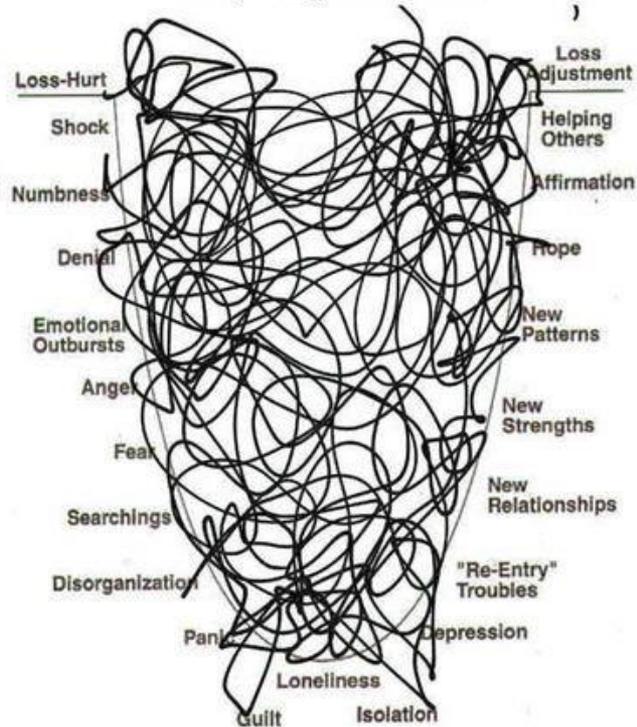
Death of a person or pet



## STAGES OF GRIEF



## My experience





Like adult grief, children feel all the same emotions, but developmentally do not have all the skills to understand and make sense of the loss, numerous grief emotions or how to cope.

Each child responds to grief and loss in a different way.

Each child's response is unique.

There is no timeline or end.

# Examples of What Outward Expression of Grief May Look Like



A preschooler who regresses; asks for the person or object repeatedly

A young child who becomes clingy

A school age child or tween who has anger outbursts.

An oldest child may turn into the “perfect” classmate, child, or helper

A teenager may become withdrawn, grades become lower

A child who has increased physical ailments – ex. increased stomach aches or headaches

\*Though grief reactions may be similar, no two child’s grief expression looks the same.

# Considerations for how to talk with Child/Teen and support with loss



- What is your relationship to child? (parent, teacher, friend, etc.)
- Dynamics of each situation and individual
- How does he/she handle stressful situations?
- Developmental Concepts (*How do I explain / talk about a specific loss to a Preschooler? School Age? Tween? Teen?*)
- Personal comfort level with talking about loss and grief

# When Considering Involvement of Children and Teens:



Being **honest**, **communicating**, and **preparing** for what they may experience or have experienced with the **softest language** and **support** can

- Help with better understanding and process,
- Create trust and respect,
- Reduce anxiety,
- Reduce social and academic problems.
- Help with preparation and support,
- Increase self-esteem,
- Increase opportunities for a child to grieve

# How You Can Support Grieving Children



Infants – Consistent Caregivers and Routine

Toddlers / Preschool – Structure / Routine; Honest, simple explanations

School Age – Simple concrete answers, Reassurance not their fault

Tween – Permission and outlets to express emotions, feeling validation

Teen – Presence of caregivers, offer of support, but encouragement / support of independence

# How You Can Support Grieving Children



Affirm that they are not alone. Give a space to ask questions and talk / play about the loss.

Help them prepare and understand what is happening, changes, and possible ways they will be affected.

Love them. Hear them. See them. Be present with them.

Have boundaries, yet understand at times nurturing support is what is needed.

Acknowledge the grief. Talk about what has changed. Talk about the person or thing that has been lost.

Help them know that they will be cared for.

Reassure if possible that it's not their fault.

Understanding all feelings are okay. And, take action if concerns of harm.

Sometimes no words are needed at all. Sit. Listen.

# Resources in our Community and Schools



School Counselors

School Mental Health Counselors

Community Based Counseling

Specialized Support Centers

Primary Care Physicians

Psychiatrists

Community Based Peer Support

Emergency Room

# The Caring House: Our Community Resource for Grieving Children



- Since 1995, Madison County's Only Not-for-profit grief support center for children and families
- Peer Support Based Model, Based on *The Dougy Center Model*
- Member of *National Alliance for Children's Grief*
- Trained Staff and Volunteers
- No Family pays for Caring House Services

# The Caring House: Our Community Resource for Grieving Children



THE CARING HOUSE Serves children loving someone with an advanced serious illness and those who have experienced the death of a loved one as a result of:

- Illness
- Accident
- Suicide
- Homicide
- Sudden Death
- Unknown Cause

Services are provided at The Caring House, in the community, and in our schools in Madison City, Madison County, and Huntsville City.

# The Caring House Services

## • Family and Community Resources

### • Initial Family Session / Caring House Orientation

• Crisis Support (ex. Death of a teacher or student)

• Special Events (ex. *Coping with the Holidays, National Children's Grief Awareness*)

• Grief Camp (ages 5-12)

• Hospice Family Care support (pediatric patients, children of adults)

• Caring House Peer Grief Support Groups (ex. new HOPE Group)

• Caring Connection Support (for children loving someone with an advanced serious illness)

Peer Support Groups are divided by ages:

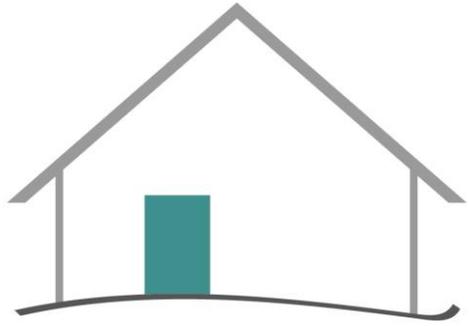
Caring House Teen Group (13-18)

Caring House Tween Group (10-12)

Caring House Kids (5-9)

Adults (Some adult groups held simultaneously)

Individual Pre-school support (3-4)



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Questions?