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Grief & Bereavement Literacy Series

Session 9: “Teen Grief: Responding, Rebuilding and Relearning”

Presenter: **Trevor Josephson Clinical Counsellor, MC, RCC**
 Manager of Clinical Services, Peace Arch Hospice Society

May 8th, 2024, 12:00pm - 1:00pm

AGENDA ITEM	DISCUSSION	RESOURCES
Introduction & Territory Acknowledgment, Objectives, Overview and Session Materials	Presenter: Trevor Josephson, MC, RCC-ACS, DVATI, Manager of Clinical Services Peace Arch Hospice Society <u>Learning Objectives</u> By the end of the session participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RESPOND supportively to a teen who is grieving and understand how teens respond to loss. • Understand the personal process of RELEARNING that is part of the grief experience for teens. • Build awareness of how teens engage in REBUILDING a new life for themselves after loss. 	
Presentation Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of “teen” - the teen years are between 13 and 19 years of age. The American Psychological Association (APA) says that it can begin as early as age 10 and some aspects of adolescent development often continue past 18 or 19 years of age even up to 21 or 25 years of age. Also, the World Health Organization notes that it could be as early as 10 years of age going up to 19 or higher and so their physical, psychological, or cultural expressions may begin earlier or end later. • The teenage years are referred to as the in-between period when one is no longer a child or has left childhood behind but not yet an adult and looking forward to adulthood. This in-between space takes place over several years and that is where identity formation comes into play where a person is discovering themselves as an adult, defining what that means for them and how they fit into the world as they are merging into adults. 	



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- The brain of a teen is undergoing construction which sometimes contributes to some of their confusing behavior that might seem confusing to adults. It might look erratic and extreme in some ways which is what is called Synaptic Pruning. This leads to better evaluation of risks and rewards as well as improved control over impulses. Changes in the levels of dopamine and serotonin make adolescents more emotional and more responsive to rewards and stress which further creates vulnerability for teens.
- What is called immaturity is a cognitive behavioral neurological flexibility that allows teens to explore and adapt to their shifting inner and outer worlds. The brain is figuring out how it's going to evolve and develop into this adulthood.
- The myth of the inevitable storm and stress of the teen years - sometimes teenage years have been referred to as the werewolf stage of human development which is unfairly labeled as being a very stormy and stressful time.
- We must be mindful that the death of someone in a teen's life is a crisis and that can also be an opportunity for learning and growth. Coping with bereavement during adolescence can lead to greater maturity not only regression or disturbance.
- Impact of grief on an adolescent: the most stressful event in the life of a teen is the death of someone important to them. This could lead to a profound impact that the death of a loved one can have on a teen's life such as a higher long-term risk of mental health problems, suicide, violent behavior. For teens who lost a parent, research has shown reported feelings of guilt, disruptions in relationships, depression, and risk-taking behaviors.
- Grief resulting from death could be seen as a dangerous opportunity that can lead to growth and maturity if responded to well or it could lead to harm if responded to poorly. This highlights how important the community need to put towards supporting teens who are grieving, and research does show that if they are supported when they're grieving, there will be positive outcomes but if the opposite happens, they will struggle leading to negative outcomes.
- The presenter shared a story of a teen he recently worked with. Her father had died, and she was struggling. He asked her to explain what she was feeling, and she couldn't find words. He further highlighted why taking an expressive therapy approach is very helpful for teens. He asked the teen to select from a group of figures and maybe find one of those



figures that represent what/how she was feeling, and she chose the image of a bridge. In conveying her sense of loss using this image, she said that she was standing in the middle of this bridge looking forward to her adulthood and looking back to her childhood. When she looked back to her childhood, she had memories of her father and she didn't want to let those go, but she felt also that as she was looking ahead to adulthood, she had to move forward, but she didn't want to. It was a feeling of being pulled in two different directions. This depicts a tug of war between the brain and the heart. So, there's a push and pull between maturing or remaining immature.

- It is important that we aren't projecting our own experience to others as this could lead to a misunderstanding of the teen's experience, and be interpreted as being judgmental. If a teen feels like they're being judged, criticized in some way, they may be very sensitive to that and they may pull away from that offer of support.
- Grief and attachment are firmly connected. Attachment being an innate emotional bond with another person which starts with primarily our caregivers and extends out to other members of our social circle. The brain is learning when it experiences the death of someone close to us which pushes one to the edge of life experience. It is like having a map of who we are, what we understand, how we understand who we are, how we understand how we connect with others and how we understand how we navigate through the world around us but when grief happens, this pushes one into an uncharted territory path.
- Three major concepts for teens that they struggle with as they are starting to form their understanding about themselves and the world around them are universality, non-functionality and irreversibility.
- The predictability of research indicates that bereaved teens have greater anxiety in fear than their nonbereaved peers, they had less control over what happened to them, more social problems and were socially withdrawn, frequently referenced the unfairness of life, Self-image- they are in that period of very sensitive development of their self-image, social identity.
- Grief contributes to personal growth. Research shows that life lessons included appreciation of life in relationships which is often reinforced by a discovered awareness of the fragility of life and increased empathy or compassion for others. Some other positive

	<p>indicators teens experienced are increased self-awareness, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-care for their own mental health, feeling of resilience to handle difficult situations because of grief.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another aspect of helping a teen grieving was to have the availability of a parent, maybe a surviving parent if one of the parents died. That seemed to be a key factor in the ability of the teen to go through their grief journey. • The risk of self-harm and suicide must be considered. Survivor guilt whether it's because of actions taken or not taken may result in self-harm and suicidal ideas/ substance use. • Teen grief support groups has been found to be extremely useful. Some important factors to note regarding how teens find resilience when they are grieving: balanced appraisal of personal strengths and limitations, attainable goals that they could feel some mastery over, internal locus of control so they're not always giving up their autonomy to external forces, relationship skills, problem solving skills, emotional regulation, self-esteem and self-efficacy, continuing bond with the parent who died, being able to accept surviving parents entering into a new relationship, which may be a struggle for some teens. • It is not about fixing when it comes to loss but being available always and in every way being flexible and adaptable to find out what's important for the teen and try to meet them there and intervene when destructive behaviors occurred. • When we think about grief, we just think it's all gloom and chaos, disorder, but what we find is that it can be an opportunity of growth and learning. 	
<p>Discussion</p>	<p>Q: How does one go about working with a group of teens who have just experienced a traumatic death amongst their peers, and they are also traumatized because they were involved directly in the death.</p> <p>A: In a group like that, right away there's a shared traumatic experience as they are all grieving for the loss of someone that was important for them.</p> <p>It is important to give the group ownership and to do things functionally where they're going to need to be guided as this will give some form of control. This allows them to guide each other towards what is going to work for them, what is going to help them and giving them opportunities to share both verbally and nonverbally. Also, creating a very supportive, non-judgmental safe space/ environment because a negative impact of support could lead to distance in seeking out therapeutic modalities. This allows for a positive association with therapy and with counseling.</p>	



Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Book Title: Helping Teams Work Through Grief. Written by Mary Percy. <p><u>Upcoming session:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tuesday, June 25th, 2024 (12:00pm - 1:00pm (PST)) <p><i>Grief in the Workplace.</i></p> <p><u>Registration link</u></p>	