
Counselling for Caregivers

Unit 7:
Grief Counselling



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Unit 7: Grief Counselling

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Unit 7: Grief Counselling

Introduction

HIV/AIDS, poverty, and armed conflicts are creating a growing number of orphans and vulnerable children. These children need the support, care, and love which they traditionally would have received from their families. With the breakdown of traditional support systems, the caregiver must provide the care, love, and support that these children need.

As a caregiver, you work daily with children who have suffered the loss of a loved one. This is the worst kind of loss since it is permanent and calls for many changes in the life of a child. Children do not have the resources to deal with this kind of loss on their own, and need our assistance.

This unit will help you understand what children are experiencing during this confusing period of loss and change and learn how to support and counsel these children so they can cope well. After reviewing some important definitions and the process of grieving in Lessons 1 and 2, Lesson 3 will describe the forms that grief may take for several different age groups of children and youth. In Lesson 4, you will learn some creative ways to help children talk about grief. Lesson 5 will deal with unresolved and complicated grief, while Lesson 6 will deal with positive effects of resolved grief. The role of rituals and religion will be examined in Lesson 7. Finally, Lesson 8 will discuss ways to help children to help grieving friends.

Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Define loss, bereavement, grieving and mourning.
2. Outline the process of grieving.
3. Explain the role of culture in bereavement.
4. Identify strategies that you can use to help children and youth who have suffered the loss of loved ones.

Lesson One

Some Definitions



Loss

What do you understand by the term loss?

Feelings of loss come from being deprived of something of significant value in one's life. The word loss is often used to refer to a break-up of an attachment that offered love and security, such as a relationship with a family member or friend. However, there are many types of losses. Let us now look at some types of losses in the following story.



Story 1: Inonge

My name is Inonge and I'm 14 years old. My father died last year. He had not paid dowry, so my mother was chased away by my uncles from my father's village. I now live with my mother, sister, and brother in a one-room hut in a nearby village. My sister and I dropped out of school after my father died. I was in Standard 5 and wanted to become a teacher in the future. Everything has changed since my father died and I do not see any hope for my future.

When my father was alive, he provided for all our needs; we now do not have enough to eat or blankets to cover ourselves at night. I wake up at 5 every morning and work in the garden with my sister. I also do all the household work. My mother goes out to work for piecework as a casual labourer for little pay. With this money she pays for my brother's school fees and the little that is left is for food. We often go hungry, which never happened when my father was alive.

I miss my father very much and cry often when I'm alone in the garden. I feel that if he were still alive, things would be better. I would still be in school, and we would have blankets and clothes and enough to eat. We would also be living in a better house. I know mother tries her best but there is not much she can do.

When I sit alone, I think of my family. I look at my brother and wonder if he will ever finish school and be a doctor like he wants. I also wish I could go back to school. As a first child, I feel responsible for everyone because my mother is now getting old. If only my father was still alive.



Activity 1

Can you identify the losses that Inonge has suffered?

Did you think of the following?

- Loss of a dream (wanted to become a teacher).
- Loss of a home.
- Loss of a father.
- Loss of education.

Bereavement

Bereavement is similar in meaning to loss; however, it is commonly used to refer specifically to the loss of a loved one.

Grief



Activity 2

How would you define grief?



Grief is the normal human response to bereavement. It is a deep human feeling of sorrow and sadness that we have when someone we love dies.



Mourning

The process of mourning involves accepting our loss, making it part of our memories, and moving on with our lives.

The deep pain from the loss of a loved one through death makes us mourn. As we grieve internally, we show our pain, which comes out through mourning. Mourning is the public expression of grief.

Personal Loss History

As a caregiver, it is important to explore and reflect on your personal loss history for many reasons. It is important because:

1. It can help you better understand the process of mourning; what it is like to go through the experience of grief and the healing process of mourning. There is nothing like looking at a significant loss in your own life to bring home the reality of the grief process.
2. By thinking about your own personal losses, you can get a clear sense of the kinds of resources available to the bereaved. This includes not only what was helpful to you when you were undergoing a specific loss, but also what was not helpful. This will help you understand what the bereaved child is going through.
3. You may care for a child who has suffered a loss similar to your own, which will bring back painful feelings from your own loss. If you did not deal adequately with your own loss, it can interfere with your ability to help the child who has suffered a loss.
4. It helps you as a caregiver to identify the kind of grieving the child is going through and make a decision accordingly about whether you can help the child or should refer him or her to experts.



Activity 3

Recall the most significant loss you have experienced in your life, focusing on your thoughts and feelings. Then complete the following sentences to express those thoughts and feelings.

The most significant loss I have experienced in my life was

I was aged

It was so significant because

I felt

I thought

I wanted to know

I was warned that

My greatest fear was

I regretted that

I needed

I wished that

I was unable to

It helped when

(continued on next page)



Activity 3 (continued)

It annoyed me when

The person who helped me most was

The hardest part was

I knew my grief was resolved when

Looking back I think that

For me as a caregiver, the greatest lessons to be learned from my loss are

It is important that you, as a caregiver, examine your thoughts and feelings about your own losses as these may influence the way you deal with bereaved children.

Lesson Two : The Grieving Process



It is important for you to know that the feelings associated with grieving and mourning are unique for each person. The stages of grieving we shall discuss are only a guide. A person tends to go back and forth between these stages and will move in and out of them at their own speed. For some, grieving can take weeks, months, or years. Whatever time it takes, grieving should be understood as a process with no fixed time limit.

Certain events can set off feelings of loss and grief long after a person has gotten over the initial stage of grief. For example, the anniversary of the loved one's death can cause the child to begin grieving all over again, although the feelings will probably not be as deep as the initial grief.

Stage	Possible Feelings	Possible Behaviour
Denial/avoidance	Shock, numbness, feelings of disbelief ("This is not true")	Unconcerned or unknowing attitude. May be inactive or overactive or fall ill
Disorganisation	Anger, guilt, shame, longing, anxiety, fear	Regression to earlier behaviours, exaggerated fears, temper tantrums, physical symptoms, lack of concentration, mood swings
Transition	Hopelessness, helplessness, despair	Withdrawal, aggression, giving up in school, depression
Reorganisation	Painful acceptance of reality	Shows interest in life, forms other attachments, better able to concentrate, has energy and motivation to move on

It is important to know that children will move back and forth and in and out of the stages of grief more frequently than adults.



Activity 4

Think of a child in your care whose mother has died.

Did the child grieve this loss?

How do you think the child felt?

What are some of the types of behaviour you noticed?



What You Need to Know about Children's Grief

Children's grief is different from that of adults, especially younger children's grief. Children tend to grieve for shorter periods of time than adults. They do not remain continuously sad. Instead you see them happy, happy, then sad the next minute. When they are happy, this does not mean that they have stopped hurting inside. The grief often resurfaces at special times throughout their lives; for example, at their graduation or wedding.

On learning about the death of a parent or loved one, children will often pretend that it did not happen to give themselves more time to figure out how they should react to this painful situation.

This can take a few hours to a few weeks depending on the following:

1. How sudden the death was.

Death always comes as shock. However, the suddenness of death affects the child's response to this loss because it will determine how well the child was prepared for the death before it happened. Unexpected death is even more difficult for a child to accept than death due to a terminal illness because with terminal illness the child starts to experience loss even before death occurs.

2. How much change the death causes in their everyday lives.
The availability of a supporting person to stand in as substitute caregiver will help the child regain control of his or her life. Children with a consistent substitute caregiver cope better and are more resilient after traumatic events than those children who lack support.
3. The age and maturity level of the child.
Children's thinking is different from that of adults. Children understand death differently at different ages and stages of their development. This is why children of different ages tend to respond to loss differently. Remember that a child will react differently depending on the child's personality and the availability of support from others around him or her.
4. Support from the community and the extended family.
Communities play an important role in providing supportive structures like schools, health services, and various support groups, all of which offer valuable support to help the child cope with loss. It is important to note that communities have their own resources and traditional ways of coping with trauma and loss. A community that is more cohesive and sound will help a child cope better and be more resilient. An existing, loving extended family that provides security and care can offer a child that has suffered loss a sense of identity and belonging. Members of the same family share the same roots and the same values and this provides warmth and a sense of protection. A dysfunctional family may have a negative effect, however, on the coping process of the child.

The death of a loved one, especially a parent, shatters a child's world. It brings feelings of insecurity and fear of the child's own death or that of other loved ones. The child wonders, "Who will die next?" and what will happen to him/her now. This causes stress, which can show itself through the following:

- Stomach pain.
- Inability to go to sleep alone.
- Anger with the dead person for leaving the child alone.
- Guilt about angry feelings.

- Anger with people who remain for not stopping the death (especially from younger children who think that adults are very powerful and able to control life and death).
- Going back to earlier stages of development like thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, and clinging to adults.

These feelings are very deep for the child, and often frightening and confusing. In this confusion, the child doesn't know what to do and usually takes breaks by playing. It is important for caregivers to remember that this need for play by the child is the child's right.

Children also experience a certain amount of guilt when someone they love dies. Younger children may think they caused the death to happen by thinking or saying the wrong thing: "I wish I had not refused to go when mommy told me to go to the market."

Following a death, children will often:

- Dream about themselves dying so they can be with mommy or daddy.
- Have dreams of the dead person and think of meeting them in heaven.
- Start to show symptoms of the person who died (for example, a very bad headache).
- Have a fear of being left alone.
- Have problems in developing close relationships with new people.
- Have difficulty going back to school because they feel like everyone is looking at them.

Three important questions that all children may think about and need answers to following a death are:

- "Did I make this happen?"
- "Will you or I die next?"
- "Who will take care of me?"

(Adapted from McCue, 1994)

Lesson Three



Grief Reactions at Different Ages

To understand how children grieve, you need to look at their ages and maturity. These affect the way children understand death and what it means for them in their lives.

Now let us look at how children grieve at different ages and maturity levels and how you can help them cope.

Children from Birth to Two Years of Age



Story 2: Musa

Musa is 13 months old. His mother died 2 weeks ago. She was single and lived alone with Musa. After her death, a neighbour came to take care of Musa. Musa does not sleep at night and screams and cries most of the time. He often refuses to eat. When other people want to hold Musa he clings to the neighbour and refuses to be put down.



Activity 5

Can you identify at least three reactions that Musa shows to his mother's death?



A child aged up to two years depends very much on parents for love, protection, food, and a sense of security.

Even at this early stage, a child has learned how to communicate his/her needs to a parent, usually the mother. When the parent dies, a child in this age group does not understand what has happened. This makes it difficult for you as a caregiver to explain what has happened.

Although these young children cannot understand what has happened, they still miss the parent. They will miss the touch, the voice, the smell and the sense of security and comfort that the parent provided. Because of this, the child may show changes in sleeping and eating habits. The

child may also cry more and be difficult to calm. Older children, from 18 months to 2 years, may be miserable and angry. They may also forget skills they have learned and go back to behaving like small babies.

How Can You Help a Child Like Musa?

When a parent dies, a very young child needs a close, constant person acting in the position of a parent or caregiver. This will help the child deal with the loss of a parent and cope more easily with the changes in his/her life. It is important that the caregiver stay the same. Young children will adapt more quickly when there are no big changes in their routine. If possible, the child should remain in the same environment with his/her brothers and sisters.

This is what you can do to support the child:

- Ensure that the substitute caregiver be close and consistent.
- The caregiver should provide a lot of bodily contact.
- The child's routine (for example, feeding time and bed time) should be the same.
- The child's environment should stay the same.
- If the child has a brother or sister they should not be separated.

Children from Two to Six Years of Age

Story 3: Mainza

Mainza is three and a half years old. Her mother died three months ago. Mainza has never met her father. Mainza and her siblings live with their 65-year-old grandmother. Each time Mainza is separated from her grandmother, she starts to cry and scream. Mainza refuses to play with her friends and stays near her grandmother all the time. At night, she sleeps in her grandmother's bed. Mainza is very anxious, cries easily, and often refuses to eat. When other people come to visit she clings to her grandmother, very scared.





Activity 6

Can you identify 3 signs of grief and loss that Mainza shows?



Children at this age are concerned with themselves and their own needs. They experience death as a loss of love, security, safety, and protection. They do not understand that death means that someone is dead and is not coming back.

At this age a child may say that his/her mother has died, but at the same time will talk about the mother coming back. Some children think the dead person didn't want them anymore. They take things that are said to them just the way they are. For you to help them understand what has happened, use appropriate language for their level of understanding; for example, "Mummy's body stopped working and she died." Statements like "Mummy went to the market" or "Mum is with God" make them confused and afraid.

Children of this age tend to connect death to whatever happened just before it. If their mother went to hospital and died, they may say, "Mummy went to the hospital and died. I think the doctors there made her die. I never want to see a doctor."



In this age group, children respond to grief in the following manner:

- They may not show their feelings for long periods of time. As they cannot handle painful experiences for long, they tend to switch off and go play.
- They may become afraid of separation and going to sleep.

- They may cry uncontrollably and throw things to express anger.
- They can cling to other relatives or refuse to be touched at all.
- Their eating habits may change.
- They may go back to earlier stages of development; for example, bed-wetting.
- They may be confused and upset when they see adults sad and crying because they do not understand what is happening.
- They may behave stubbornly.

How Can You Help a Child Like Mainza?

What can you do to support a child aged two to six years after the death of the parent? Once again, it is important to have a consistent substitute caregiver. The child needs to be spoken to in language he/she can understand. The child needs to be comforted and encouraged over and over with soft words, hugs, and hand-holding. In addition, the following can help:

- Allow the child to talk about the loss and share fears and worries.
- Answer questions simply and honestly.
- Help the child recognise and name feelings, e.g. "It sounds like you are worried (angry, sad, etc.)..."
- Provide opportunities for play. Toys and other play materials are essential tools to help young children deal with grief.
- Be patient with behaviours such as thumbsucking or bedwetting.
- Be close and consistent.
- Spend time with the child, show interest, and play with him or her. Give lots of affection and bodily contact.
- The child's environment and routine should stay the same (as far as is possible).
- The child should not be separated from brothers or sisters.
- Share good memories and stories about the dead parent with the child, and show pictures of the parent and child together.
- Reassure the child about the future.
- Encourage the child to play with others.
- Reassure the child that he/she did not do anything to make



the parent die and that a lot of people still love him/her.

Children from Six to Nine Years of Age



Story 4: Maina

Maina is seven years old. After his father died last year, Maina's mother had to go to work in town and she only comes home to the village three times a year. Maina's brothers and sisters have been living with the grandfather and nine other cousins since their mother left for town. Maina has started wetting his bed for the first time since he was 3 years old. He wakes up in the night and finds his bed wet. This embarrasses him and he cries. His cousins and brother laugh at him and the wet blankets. The bigger boys tease him, calling him "baby," and do not allow him to play with them. At school, the children also laugh at him, so Maina does not want to go to school anymore. He misses his mother a lot and wishes his father would come back.



Activity 7

How does Maina respond to his grief? List at least three reactions.



Did you think of the following?

Maina is wetting his bed for the first time since he was three years old. He feels sad and does not want to go to school because his friends laugh at him. This is accompanied by a sense of abandonment and fear that there is no one to look after him. He may not even understand that it is possible for him to survive without his parent.

Children of this age may also refuse to sleep alone or insist on keeping lights on at night. Some children may refuse to go outside or use a toilet at night. Other children behave in a strange way that you wouldn't expect, but this is a way of protecting themselves from the painful experience. They may sometimes giggle, joke, and show off after the loss of the parent. This can be very upsetting for the surviving family members who will often scold or punish them. As a caregiver, try to understand the child's reactions, as the child is trying through these reactions to avoid the pain of loss.

During this stage, children start to explore the world outside them. Although they understand what death is about, their understanding of the finality of death swings from death being a reality to death as reversible. They have “magical thinking” where they believe that if they want something bad enough they can make it happen; for example, if they had at one point wished that the person would die then they might believe that they made it happen. They may also have a lot of fear about death for they think of death as bad “spirits” or death as something that happens to a bad guy.

To come to an understanding of death they ask a lot of “why” questions. They are interested in how death happens and “why” a person died. This may be a difficult question for you as a caregiver but it is important that you answer as honestly as possible. Caregivers may notice that the child starts playing sickness and death games with other children. This is a normal and natural process by which the child tries to understand and come to terms with death. It encourages healing and coping so caregivers should not stop the child from this kind of play.



Story 5: Chipo

Two months ago, seven-year-old Chipo came home from school to be told by his mother that his father had died suddenly. His father had only been sick for a few days.

Chipo showed few signs of deep grieving at the time although he was sad and withdrawn, did not talk much, and didn't ask many questions. He attended the funeral and visited the grave at times with his mother.

Chipo has been withdrawn and quiet since his father's death. He doesn't like leaving the house to go to school. When he gets to school, he is very shy. He concentrates on his work, which he does neatly and very accurately. When he makes mistakes he seems to be very frightened, erasing the mistake so hard that his exercise book is full of holes.

When his teachers ask him about the holes he starts to cry. When his mother asks him why he rubbed holes in his books, he says that if he didn't rub his mistakes out properly, his mother would die too. When his mother asks why he thinks so, Chipo says that his father died on the day he got into trouble for not listening at school and was told to repeat a whole exercise.

Chipo's story shows the "magical thinking" that is typical of this age group.



Activity 8

Having read about Chipo's story and learned about how children in this age group respond to loss, list some ways that you can help him and other children like him cope with loss.



When you are talking to children in this age group you should discuss death openly. Do not say things like, "Mommy is sleeping." Be simple and honest, "Your mommy has died". Children who are told that mommy is sleeping may be afraid of going to sleep for fear that they will die also.

Children at this stage are interested in what will happen to the parent after he or she has been buried. It is the caregiver's task to explain to the child concepts of heaven, ancestors, or reincarnation according to the family culture and religion. During this phase the child may begin to understand abstract concepts like moving from one form of life to another (becoming an angel or "going to be with Jesus").

Before explaining to the child where the parent has gone, it is important for the adult to be secure in his/her own beliefs. Spiritual, religious, and cultural beliefs are very important for the wellbeing of the child. It has been shown that children with a spiritual or cultural belief system cope better than those without. It is up to the caregiver to strengthen the child's beliefs and to do so in a way that is respectful of the child's family's beliefs.

Allowing children to take part in religious and traditional rituals after a death (for example, attending the funeral) helps children to understand what has happened. When children understand what has happened it increases their ability to cope.

Explaining the Concept of Death

You can use this exercise to explain death to a child. Have the child pull a single piece of hair from his/her head. Explain that it hurts when it is pulled because it is living. Have the child pull out the hair completely. Explain that once the hair is off the body it becomes dead and we no longer feel it. Explain that it is similar with people: when they were alive they could feel pain through the body but now that they are dead their body has stopped working and they no longer feel pain.

To summarise, here are some ways to help children in this age group cope with their grief:

- Be patient with children and sensitive to their needs.
- Provide comfort.
- Maintain a daily routine.
- Assure them that they did not cause the death. They should be reassured many times and made to understand that the death of parents is not in any way related to their behaviour and that it is not their fault that the parents or someone they love died.
- Share positive memories and stories about the deceased. Look at pictures of the dead person together, visit the grave, and have times of remembrance. If you are a member of the family, tell the child stories about things that the parent did when he or she was the child's own age. At this stage, children love listening to stories.
- Explain religious rituals and encourage the child to take part.
- Allow the children to help, but not take on too much responsibility.
- Encourage children to express their feelings about death



Children from Nine to Twelve Years

Story 6: Chanda

Chanda is ten years old. He lives with his grandmother and his grandfather, a domestic worker. His father left Chanda when he was three years old and his mother died two years ago. Chanda's aunt and her four children also live with Chanda's grandmother. Chanda's aunt says Chanda does not obey any rules at home. His teacher reports that he sometimes stays away from his grandmother's house until late in the evening and he has been hanging around with older boys at the bus stop.

On the rare occasions that Chanda is at home, his aunt observes that he and his cousins are playing violent games like throwing stones at girls next door and deliberately hurting the dog. Chanda has no real friends at school. Some children still play with him at times, but the others are scared of him. Chanda gets very lonely.



Activity 9

Can you identify the types of behaviour shown by Chanda that may be signs of grief?



Did you think of the following?

Chanda expresses his feelings of anger, fear, or sadness through aggressive and rebellious behaviour. Chanda's behaviour may be caused by anger at the loss of his parents and the change in his environment. Having to get used to a new group of family members could cause feelings of insecurity. Chanda may feel threatened and long to be appreciated and recognised. He gets this by hanging around with older boys at the bus stop. This helps Chanda feel that he has some power.

By the time they are this age, children are able to understand things more clearly. They start attending school and are eager to learn. The

teachers are very important during this phase as they may spend more time with the children. Children learn to socialise and learn from friends and group activities. The child understands what causes death but cannot understand what the result of death is. Although children might occasionally use magical themes, they generally know the difference between fantasy and reality.

Children in this age group go through a mourning process similar to that of adults. Some children may not, however, accept a parent's death. Others may try to find a reason why the parent died. They may feel betrayed by God or by their ancestors.

In response to grief children in this age group may:

- Withdraw from adults.
- Become depressed and sad.
- Engage in risk-taking and self-destructive behaviours.
- Lack concentration and attention.
- Try to pretend to be normal and cover their emotions in order to seem grown up.
- Be anxious about their own lives and afraid they are going to die.
- Show great concern for others.
- Ask questions about death.
- Go back to earlier childhood behaviour.
- Behave aggressively by having temper tantrums or becoming a bully at school.



Activity 10

What are some ways you could help Chanda?



The caregiver needs to find out the reasons for the behaviour then work with the child to deal with these.

Did you think of any of the following?

- Providing close and consistent caregiving.
- Offering comfort and encouragement.
- Teaching the child basic skills such as assertiveness.
- Encouraging the child to go to school.
- If possible, not allowing the child to be separated from his/her brothers and sisters.
- Encouraging the child to spend time with other children, especially those of his/her own age.
- Spending time with the child, showing interest in him/her and having fun together.
- Listening to what the child has to say and trying to understand how the child is feeling.
- Encouraging the child to express his/her feelings (children express feelings in various ways, as we will learn).
- Sharing positive memories and stories about the deceased with the child.
- Teaching the child how to keep in contact with the deceased parent by “relocating” the memory of the parent to a “place” where the child can easily bring the parent to mind.
- Finding appropriate times to discuss death and disease.
- Discussing issues of HIV/AIDS, particularly prevention of transmission.
- Giving the child small responsibilities and tasks.
- Be truthful and factual in discussing their loss.
- Accept that they will experience mood swings and physical symptoms.

Adolescent Children from 13 to 18 Years of Age



Story 7: Bwalya

Bwalya is 14 years old. When she was 12 years old, her mother started getting ill and was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Because Bwalya is the eldest of five children, her mother told her about her HIV status.

When Bwalya was 13, her mother fell ill and gradually grew worse. Bwalya took over the responsibility of looking after her mother and her siblings. She dropped out of school because she could not combine her education with all the work at home. Bwalya made sure her siblings attended school. In her spare time, Bwalya worked for other people to get money for food at home and to buy medicine for her sick mother.

When her mother died three months ago, Bwalya arranged for the funeral with the help of neighbours. She cried at first but later did not seem to be bothered about the death; however, she was worried whether she would be able to go back to school. Now she has been separated from her siblings, who were taken to live with different relatives. An uncle took Bwalya away without consulting her. Bwalya feels guilty that she is not able to take care of her family now that she is so far away from them. She is angry with the uncle that he had taken her away and left her siblings behind. Recently Bwalya has become very quiet. She prefers to talk to her friends rather than to the uncle.



Activity 11

What types of behaviour show Bwalya's reaction to her loss?



Did you think of the following? In response to grief teenagers may:

- Show signs of withdrawal and turn their feelings inwards.
- Only want to be with friends and not family as being with family can cause feelings of guilt.

- Seem unaffected by the death or unable to let out feelings. This may be shown by:
 - Failing at school.
 - Getting into fights.
 - Temper tantrums.
 - Being rude.
 - Running away from home.
 - Being dishonest.
 - Getting in trouble with the law.
 - Taking drugs and drinking alcohol.
 - Engaging in prostitution.
 - Talking about or showing suicidal tendencies.
 - Being very quiet/mature.
 - Withdrawing.

This is a period of intense thinking about one's self, feelings, and perceptions of the rest of the world. When dealing with death, teenagers understand that death is real and spend a lot of time thinking about how death will affect them and those around them.

They even fantasise about their own death, thinking "Who will be there?" Young teenagers may at times still think that death will not happen to anyone they love. They feel that no one understands them, especially adults. Because of this they relate more closely to their fellow teenagers.

They may be afraid of death as they understand it and realise that it is something that they cannot predict or control. They may be afraid of seeing the body of the deceased for fear of how it will look. They may also feel guilty about things they did or did not do when the person was alive.



Activity 12

How could you help Bwalya?



This age group is often ignored and more attention paid to younger children. But these youth also need attention as much as do the younger children.

- Ask Bwalya what would help her; she may have some concrete suggestions to make. Use open-ended questions; for example, "What do you think we can do in this situation?"
- Discuss which suggestions are possible and which are impossible. Treat Bwalya like an adult, but remember that she is still a child and needs guidance.
- Hand over some responsibilities to Bwalya that she will be able to manage and control.
- In the future, include Bwalya in decisions that affect her life.

Children in this age group need:

- Respect and privacy to grieve in their own way.
- To have their feelings respected.
- To be involved in planning and in family discussions and decisions.
- To be encouraged to express their grief in other ways like sport, writing, music, drama, and art.
- To be reassured that the deceased person loved them even if things were not always good at home.
- Not be questioned about their feelings.
- To be around their peers.
- Reassurance about their future.

Lesson Four

Some Ways to Help Children Talk about Grief

As a caregiver, you will need to know various ways to encourage children to talk about grief and their emotions. Some of these have already been explained.



Activity 13

What ways can you think of to encourage children to talk about their emotions and their grief?



Did you think of these?

1. Drawing/Artwork

Children usually like to express themselves in drawing. They can draw pictures to show how they feel, to say goodbye to the deceased person, and to bring back happy memories of the person who has died.

Ask children to tell you about the picture; do not interpret it for them.

2. Storytelling

Encourage the child to tell (or write) a story about the person who died and about things they used to do together. Let the child share the story with others.

3. Writing

For children who are able to write, let them write down any memories, feelings, and what they wish they had said or done for the person who

has died, but didn't. All of these are ways to say goodbye. Have them make a memory book about a holiday or the happiest/saddest memory of their lives. Use a scrapbook, a photo album, or pages fastened together in an attractive way to make a book the child can keep. The book can contain stories, photos, or pictures cut from magazines as a way of recording a special memory.

You could invite children to make a Loss Timeline, filling it in with the people they have lost in the order in which they have died. Or they could create a family tree using a circle to show the people in their family who are still living and a square to show the people who have died. This can help them to see that there are people who are left to support them.

4. Drama and Imagination

Use dolls and puppets or act out plays to express emotions. Direct the play of younger children to acting out the funeral or memories of the dead person.

5. Music

Children like to express themselves through music and song. Encourage them to do so. They may want to beat a drum harder, for example, to get the anger and sadness out.

6. Sports/Physical Activity

Encourage children to use physical activities to express their emotions.

Football, jumping, hitting a ball, and running help children release their pent-up energy and emotions.

Lesson Five



Unresolved and Complicated Grief

Everyone grieves in his or her own way; the response to grief varies from person to person. However, certain warning signs may indicate that individuals, especially children, are not handling the grieving process well and need extra help and attention.

When life issues are not expressed or not acknowledged, they become locked or frozen within the child. Feelings remain unexpressed. This stops the child from going through the normal grieving process.

Grief can remain unresolved for various reasons, including:

- Not getting enough time to grieve because of continuous losses; dealing with one grief first and the other later.
- Not getting enough information. If children are not told the truth about the death, loss, or separation then they make things up in their minds and act accordingly.
- Not being allowed to take part in death rituals in which the family and community mourn; exclusion from the funeral or similar situations that allow and accept expression of painful feelings. Such exclusions can cut children off from their sense of themselves as normal people.
- Not getting enough support during the grieving process, due to inexperienced friends, lack of a supportive adult, isolation by peers, preoccupation by the caregiver, or, for the young adult, pressure to be “strong.”
- Not having a safe place/space to express feelings and act out stress, which can explode in violence later.



Activity 14

Discuss what might be some of the warning signs of abnormal grief; that is, that a child or youth is not coping well with grief.

(continued on next page)

Activity 14 (continued)

What are some of the ways you can use to help children and youth with unresolved grief better cope with their situation?



Children often express their feelings through play. Things that you as a caregiver can watch for when a child is in a play situation are:

- Prolonged fear of being alone.
- Acting much younger for a long period of time.
- Excessively imitating the dead person, repeated statements of wanting to join the dead person.
- Extreme fear of separation.
- Withdrawal from friends.
- Mood swings.
- New ways of play which are aggressive, like pushing, shoving, or acting out killing someone.
- Continuous feelings of depression and hopelessness.
- Suicidal tendencies.
- Expressing concerns when they talk or play.
- Problems at school.

Now let us look at the most common warning signs of abnormal grief and how we can help children and youth cope.

Sleep Disturbance



Activity 15

Bwalya is five years old and lives together with her brothers and a sister. Her sister, who is 17 years old, looks after them all. Both her parents are dead. At night Bwalya refuses to go to bed. She always has excuses to stay up and she finally falls asleep in various places in the house.

There could be many reasons why Bwalya is refusing to go to bed. Which ones can you think of?



Did you think of the following?

- She may not be tired enough to sleep.
- She may be hungry.
- She may not want to sleep alone.
- She may be afraid of having bad dreams.
- She may be afraid of the dark.
- She may be afraid that her sister, who is the caregiver, will die as their parents did.

What can you do to help?

- Find out why Bwalya does not want to go to bed. Act accordingly.
- Make sure she has a quiet place, if possible, to sleep.
- Make her comfortable in bed and promise you will be there when she wakes up.
- Tell Bwalya that her other siblings will soon be coming to bed as well. When putting Bwalya to sleep have a routine that you follow every evening, such as a prayer or short story. If she is afraid of the dark, leave the light on or light a candle. Be

patient with Bwalya and do not shout or threaten her, but be firm and insist that she go to sleep. Do not give up when Bwalya begs you to let her stay up. If she starts crying, comfort her for a short time but leave her alone in bed. Although this may sound mean, she will soon learn to be calm and fall asleep when it is her bedtime.

Eating Disturbance

It is normal for a child not to want to eat much following a loss. However, if there are big changes in the child's regular eating pattern, it is a cause for concern.

A child is not coping with loss and needs extra attention and help if:

- The child is not eating at all, even a favourite food.
- The child is eating at all times, to the point of becoming ill.

How can you help?

- Allow the child more time to talk about feelings.
- Involve the child in physical, fun activities such as sport; this will help improve his or her appetite.

Deep Fears

As we have learned, everyone experiences fear to a certain extent. Following the death of someone close to a child, there may be a fear of changes about to happen, of being alone, or of death itself.

Banda is five years old. At night she wakes up screaming with her body shaking. When her grandmother tries to hold and comfort her, Banda pushes her away. She does not recognise her grandmother and fears her.



Activity 16

How would you help Banda?



In Banda's story, do you recognise any signs of abnormal grief?

Banda is not coping well with loss and needs additional attention. Some signs include:

- She has developed deep fears, even of her grandmother.
- She may be so afraid that she has bad dreams.

As a caregiver, you should be aware of how the child describes the fear. The child will give you all the information.

- Show understanding of feelings and fears, using words like, "I believe you. What you are going through and your feelings are real."
- Openly and gently talk about these fears, for what may seem silly to an adult is very real for a child. Saying "Don't be silly" isn't convincing and does not help the child.
- Remember that fear is real.

School Problems



Story 8: Thuli

Thuli is nine years old. She has one sister, who is 13, and a younger brother, who is one and a half years old. Thuli does not know her father. Her mother fell sick months ago and Thuli was sent to live with her aunt, who lives about an hour's walk from home. Thuli comes to visit her mother and the baby sometimes. Thuli's sister is taking care of her mother and the baby. Thuli does not know what has made her mother sick. Her mother later dies. Thuli still attends school, but her teacher has noticed that Thuli (who always was a good student) gets restless and finds it difficult to concentrate in class. She is easily distracted and seems to pay little attention to what the teacher says. Her work becomes untidy and is sometimes full of mistakes. Her grades at school have dropped dramatically. Thuli acts without thinking more often than before and, in recent months, has started fighting with friends. She is often impatient with herself and friends.



Activity 17

In Thuli's story, what are some of the warning signs of abnormal grief that you see?



A child is not coping with grief and needs extra help if:

- Grades drop suddenly.
- The child is picking fights with others.
- The child's work has recently become poorly written and is full of mistakes.
- The child has become disrespectful of teachers.

Before you start helping Thuli, you need to find out why she is behaving this way.



Activity 18

What are some of the reasons you can think of for Thuli's behaviour?



Thuli could be behaving the way she is because:

- She has been separated from her siblings.
- Her mother has died and she blames herself.
- She may feel abandoned.
- She may blame herself for having been sent away.

How will you help Thuli cope?

- Explain to Thuli that she has not been sent away because her family does not like her.
- Explain that it was not her fault that her mother died.
- Encourage Thuli to take part in sport or other extra-curricular activities.
- Make sure teachers at school are aware of Thuli's situation.
- Encourage her; give praise when she makes an effort to do something positive.

Specialised Care

Some children experience extreme reactions to grief. The extreme feelings or other over-reactions to grief may become prolonged as time goes on, rather than decreasing.

Watch for signs of unresolved or abnormal grief. If you think that the child's reaction is very severe, the child will probably need more specialised help than you can offer.



Activity 19

Identify and list organisations in your area that are able to offer specialised care to children with an abnormal or extreme reaction to grief.

Lesson Six

Resolved Grief: The Positive Effects



Having learned about grief and how to help children cope, let us now examine how to know if a child is coping well with loss and whether his or her grief has been resolved.

Grief can be said to be resolved when it has been experienced fully, so that the person can integrate it with the rest of his or her life experiences. Although a person may never completely stop mourning or grieving, when grief is on its way to being resolved there will be changes, many of which will be positive.



Activity 20

What positive changes might take place as grief is resolved?



Here are some changes that may happen to both children and adults as their grief is resolved:

- They will begin to better relate to individuals and the community.
- They will be able to listen to and respect different experiences.
- They will have a wider understanding of both the world and themselves.
- They will begin to value their own lives more.
- They will develop closer personal relationships.
- They will have interest in new activities.
- People who were withdrawn will start mixing with friends.
- They will be able to give, learn, and listen better.
- They will be good company to others.
- They will develop a higher self-esteem.

Although it may seem hard to believe, grief can bring positive changes.

Lesson Seven

The Importance of Rituals in Mourning and Grieving



Family beliefs and rituals are very important when a person dies. The religious and traditional belief system gives meaning to the person's death. Even when children do not understand the ritual or ceremony they take part in, it helps them to feel included with the rest of the family during this period.



Story 9: Nelima and Banda

Nelima, 7 years old, and her brother Banda, who is 10 years old, attend your centre regularly. Their mother had been HIV positive and ailing for a long time. She died in the hospital three weeks ago, leaving them with their father.

Five days after their mother's death, the children do not yet know that she has died. The father tells you that he has not told them because it would be too much for them and he does not want to hurt them or see them cry. However, the children know there is something terribly wrong just from the way that other children look at them and whisper when they are near.

Three days after you spoke with their father, the children were taken up country to stay at an aunt's place. Banda insists on being told what is happening. This is when the aunt tells them their mother has died. They both cried for a long time. The aunt was very upset at this and finally told them to stop.



Activity 21

What are some of the traditions and practices in your community with regard to mourning and grieving that could influence how children cope with grief?

(continued on next page)

In Nelima and Banda’s story, what happened that might make it difficult for the children to cope with grief?

As their caregiver, what would you do differently to help the children cope better?



In this story we see that:

- The children were not initially informed about their mother’s death.
- They did not take part in the mourning rituals or any arrangements being made to bury their mother.
- They did not attend their mother’s funeral or burial.
- In school, they did not share what had happened to them with their friends. This made them feel isolated.
- They were told to stop crying after learning about their mother’s death.

Rituals that are carried out after a death are important because:

- They acknowledge that something terrible has happened; that someone has died.
- They are an important way of communicating the reality of the loss to the family.
- They include some commemoration of the past and an awareness of the future for the person who has died and for the family members still living. This makes those affected more able to cope with the present.
- They provide an opportunity to express feelings openly.
- Taking part in these rituals has a consoling and healing effect on both children and adults.

- They help to strengthen our belief systems, which we are then able to use in coping with our loss.

The funeral is significant because:

- Funerals are a way for the bereaved to 'say goodbye' to the family member who has died.
- They make the death more real.
- They provide an opportunity for family and friends to come together to support one another.

How can you help children to cope with a loss through the rituals and ceremonies taking place?

- Include them whenever possible in the planning and make them part of the actual events.
- Tell them what will happen during the burial ceremonies and events.
- Allow them to ask questions, and answer them honestly.
- Allow them, if they want, to send a gift to be buried with the person as a reminder of them. This could be a picture or some other memento.
- Allow them to take part in throwing sand or soil in the grave, and to lay a wreath.
- Give them some role or responsibility (appropriate to their age) during the ceremony.

Attending a funeral should be a child's choice. If the child chooses not to attend for any reason, do not force the child. Some children may be frightened or do not want to view the dead body. Children can be helped to honour the dead person and to keep memories alive by helping them say a prayer, by telling a story about the person, by lighting a candle in memory of the person, or by looking at photos. The caregiver can also help by collecting important items for the child that the deceased might have wanted the child to have. This helps the child come to terms with the loss of the loved one.

Lesson Eight

Helping Friends that Are Grieving



A child going through grief or bereavement needs to be listened to, be accepted, and have companionship, information, and role models. He or she also needs reassurance that these needs will continue to be met.

Children’s peers, especially those who are resilient, can play an important role in helping friends cope with grief. Children often feel more open and free to relate to other children, and are able to express their feelings more with them than with adults.

Helping children learn to understand and help a grieving friend can be done through developing effective systems, such as peer mediation or counselling, friendship groups, pupil councils, mentors in the community and school, and /or specific companions for the children. The community should also have youth-led initiatives that help children in coping with grief, such as regular weekend meetings to share feelings. Music, art, and sports activities can also provide opportunities for providing support to children.

As a caregiver who understands how to support children who are grieving, you can coach other children to show compassion for grieving friends and to offer their friendship and support.



Activity 22

In your community are there any youth-led initiatives to help children cope with grief?

If so, how are children helping each other cope with grief?

If not, how might you initiate these programmes for children in your community?



Summary

By now, you have learned and realised that no one is too young to grieve. When someone we love dies, his or her loss affects us and we need to deal with this loss to help us to continue normally with our own lives.

Children grieve differently from adults, depending on their age and maturity level. Moreover, culture, religion, and family traditions will affect the way people mourn and grieve. We have seen ways in which the above factors will affect a grieving child negatively or positively. Sometimes, a child is unable to come to terms with their loss, and some tools to help you deal with such cases have been discussed.

Here are some points to remember in dealing with grief in children:

- Following a death, the child's first question, spoken or not, will be, "who will take care of me now?" The child needs reassurance.
- Keep the same routine as much as possible, both at home and at school.

Allow the children to ask questions, and be honest with them.



Self-Assessment Exercise

Question 1

Fill in the blanks in the sentence below.

Grief is a _____ human _____ to _____.

Question 2

Fill in the blanks in the sentence below.

Loss can be defined as a _____ of being _____ of something _____ or of _____ in one's life.

Question 3

Fill in the blanks in the table below.

Stage	Possible Feelings	Possible Behaviour
Denial/avoidance		Unconcerned or unknowing attitude. May be inactive or overactive or fall ill
	Anger, guilt, shame, longing, anxiety, fear	Regression to earlier behaviours, exaggerated fears, temper tantrums, physical symptoms, lack of concentration, mood swings
Transition	Hopelessness, helplessness, despair	
Reorganisation		Shows interest in life, forms other attachments, better able to concentrate, has energy and motivation to move on



Question 4

Fill in the blanks below.

Children _____ differently from adults depending on their _____ and _____ level.

Question 5

Think about a child you know well who has experienced the loss of a loved one. What have you done to help that child cope with the loss?

Now that you have worked through this unit, what other things might you do for this child?



Suggested Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Question 1

Grief is a normal human response to loss.

Question 2

Loss can be defined as a result of being deprived of something significant or of value in one's life.

Question 3

Stage	Possible Feelings	Possible Behaviour
Denial/avoidance	Shock, numbness, feelings of disbelief ("This is not true")	Unconcerned or unknowing attitude. May be inactive or overactive or fall ill
Disorganisation	Anger, guilt, shame, longing, anxiety, fear	Regression to earlier behaviours, exaggerated fears, temper tantrums, physical symptoms, lack of concentration, mood swings
Transition	Hopelessness, helplessness, despair	Withdrawal, aggression, giving up in school, depression
Reorganisation	Painful acceptance of reality	Shows interest in life, forms other attachments, better able to concentrate, has energy and motivation to move on

Question 4

Children grieve differently from adults, depending on their age and maturity level.



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Glossary

Bereavement: The loss of a loved one, usually by death.

Grief: A deep feeling of sorrow and sadness that comes from the loss of someone or something that has been important in one's life.

Loss: Being deprived of a person or thing that was important in one's life.

Mourning: An expression of deep sorrow following a death or other significant loss.

Rituals: Actions based on religion or traditional beliefs which help to commemorate and give meaning to a person's death.

