Webinar When Grief Strikes: Using Mindfulness to Help the Grieving Student

Dr. Natalie Spencer & Dr. Lee Edmondson Grimes
January 5, 2018

Who Are We?

• Dr. Natalie Spencer
• Dr. Lee Grimes
Learning outcomes

• Upon completion of this webinar you should be able to:
  • Identify the different types of grief
  • Develop an understanding of mindfulness
  • Discuss different types of grief and mindfulness techniques
  • Develop a small group for grieving students

Who Are You?

• Please indicate which age group you work?
  – 1. Elementary
  – 2. Middle School
  – 3. High School
  – 4. K-12
  – 5. K-8
  – 6. Other
Demographics

• Where is your school located
  • A. Urban
  • B. Suburban
  • C. Rural

• What are the types of loss your students experience?
Types of Grief

- Anticipatory Grief - Prolonged illness (cancer) or memory impairment (Alzheimer's). Start grieving the loss of “former self” long before death.
- Sudden Loss - Happens suddenly, unexpectedly, traumatic. Generates shock and confusion.

Stages of Grief

- Shock* - Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.
- Denial - Trying to avoid the inevitable.
- Anger - Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
- Bargaining - Seeking in vain for a way out.
- Depression - Final realization of the inevitable.
- Testing* - Seeking realistic solutions.
- Acceptance - Finally finding the way forward.

*This model is adapted slightly from the original Kubler-Ross model, which does not explicitly include the Shock and Testing stages. These stages however are often useful in understanding and facilitating change.
Grief is not linear!

Grief and Children

Children will have grief “bursts” followed by play and normal activities.

Children may not be able to verbalize how they feel.

Instead they demonstrate feeling through play and behavior.
What are some examples of this behavior?

Sadness

Anger

Regression - i.e. bedwetting when potty trained

Grief and Children

**Before Age 5**- Most children do not realize people will die, including themselves

**By Age 9** most children develop an understanding of death and the person is not coming back. Death is final
Grief and Teens

In adolescence, anger allows teens to counteract grief.

**Watch for suicide risk**

- **Self esteem** and **identity** issues. In adolescence, anger allows them to counteract grief. Watch for suicide risk.
- Feelings of **guilt**, forced to address issues for which they are not developmentally prepared.
- **Body language** and acting out which can lead to **poor** school performance.
What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is becoming aware of the present
Goes beyond meditation and yoga
Goal is to experience each day fully and become aware of your feelings and emotions

DON'T IGNORE YOUR THOUGHTS
Mindfulness is a mental push up!

It takes practice to build strength!

Mindfulness and Grief

Techniques

Deep Breathing
Body Scan
Guided Imagery
Mindful Walking
Mindful Coloring
Exploring Emotions
Bouncing Back
Let’s look at an example activity

Mindful Walking for Grief -

Use a script or repeat a mantra
Help relax and focus on thoughts. Use deep breathing.

Mindfulness and Grief Case Study

Kelly is in 4th grade and her dog, Gizmo died suddenly three weeks ago. Gizmo was the family dog and has been with the family since Kelly was a baby. Kelly is heartbroken. Her father told you about Gizmo’s death.
You met with Kelly and she burst into tears at the mention of Gizmo’s name. You give Kelly a tissue. What are some mindful techniques you can use?
How to Help Kelly?

Sit with her & Sit in silence

Introduce mindful breathing
Slowly breath in and out
Or
Use the mindful Walking Activity

What else?

School Counselors and Grief

Remind students school is a safe place to grieve
Talk about death
Learn about grief
Get help! Visit local hospice and religious organizations - if desired and welcomed.
Developing a Small Group

Create a small group where you introduce stages of grief and mindfulness techniques.

Goal is to help students learn how to regulate feelings and grief

Screening is important- Some students at different stages of grief/ development

Group Outline

Introduction
Loss Profile
Stages of Loss/Grief
Introduce Mindfulness
Decision Making
Support Network
Wall of Gratitude

Find more Resources


Natalie Spencer- nfspence@ncat.edu
Lee Edmondson Grimes- legrimes@valdosta.edu
Thank you