

1997

Helping adolescents deal with loss

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Mertens, Benita J., "Helping adolescents deal with loss" (1997). *Graduate Research Papers*. 1190.
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Helping adolescents deal with loss

Abstract

Adolescents can learn to cope with loss and grief through group counseling, individual counseling, family counseling, or talking with friends and family members. Because all people do not grieve in the same manner, is one of these methods of grieving suitable for all, or is one healthier than another? What feelings are common to adolescents working through loss issues? What are the age-specific variables related to loss? What types of interventions are most effective when dealing with adolescents who are mourning? All of these questions must be answered in order to learn more about how adolescents work through loss and to know what interventions may be appropriate in helping them with the mourning process.

HELPING ADOLESCENTS DEAL WITH LOSS

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

**by
Benita J. Mertens
May 1997**

This Research Paper By: Benita J. Mertens

Entitled: HELPING ADOLESCENTS DEAL WITH LOSS

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

2-14-97

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During adolescence, all adolescents will experience some type of loss. This loss may not be death, which is most commonly associated with loss, but it may be other types of loss such as that resulting from a broken friendship, parental divorce, moving, the break-up of a romantic relationship, or high school graduation. According to Eddowes and Hranitz (1989), adolescents may experience three types of loss: loss of peers and significant others through moving, rejection, death, and suicide; loss of parents through rejection, abandonment, divorce, and death; and loss of normal life stages through physical or sexual abuse.

Adolescents can learn to cope with loss and grief through group counseling, individual counseling, family counseling, or talking with friends and family members. Because all people do not grieve in the same manner, is one of these methods of grieving suitable for all, or is one healthier than another? What feelings are common to adolescents working through loss issues? What are the age-specific variables related to loss? What types of interventions are most effective when dealing with adolescents who are mourning? All of these questions must be answered in order to learn more about how adolescents work through loss and to know what interventions may be appropriate in helping them with the mourning process.

Counselors can benefit from researching this topic because there are vast numbers of adolescents who cope with grief and loss every year. In a study of 211 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14, Glass (1991) found that 28% had experienced the separation or divorce of their parents, 52% had changed schools, 50% had broken up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, 53% had broken a relationship

with a best friend, and over 55% had moved. Glass (1991) concluded that only five percent of 211 early adolescents had not previously experienced loss as a result of the death of a family member, friend, or pet. In this same study, Glass also found that 41% of the same students had been personally affected by the death of a family member, friend, or pet within the previous year, and 33.5% had attended a funeral within the past 12 months.

Loss associated with death is the most common type of loss. Van Dexter (1986) contended that one out of every six children will lose a parent by death before they turn eighteen years of age. In a study of 190 high school students, McNeil (cited in Swihart, Silliman, & McNeil, 1992) reported that 63% of the population had experienced the death of a peer. This research suggests that adolescents experience significant loss (Glass, 1991). Counselors can help adolescents cope with their losses through the use of appropriate individual or group interventions.

The purpose of this paper is to examine ways in which adolescents grieve and to identify possible interventions that will help them through the mourning process. The topics of this paper include the mourning process, characteristics and feelings common to individuals working through loss issues, developmentally appropriate group and individual interventions, and age-specific variations associated with losses typically experienced during adolescence.

Throughout this paper, grief work refers to the cognitive processing of confronting a loss, going over the events before and at the time of death, focusing on memories, and working toward detachment from the deceased (Stroebe, 1992).

According to Worden (1982), the term grief includes a broad range of feelings and behaviors that are common to loss. Kandt (1994) stated that "researchers in the field refer to grief as the process of 'working through' the loss" (p. 204).

Mourning Process

Worden (1991) referred to mourning as "the adaption to loss" (p. 10). He also distinguished between mourning and grief. Mourning is a term used to indicate the process which occurs after a loss, while grief is the personal experience of the loss. As described by Volkan & Zintl (1993), mourning is "the psychological response to any loss or change, the negotiations we make to adjust our inner world to reality" (p. 2).

Worden (1991) identified four tasks of mourning which he believes people progress through in order to reestablish equilibrium and to complete the process of mourning. Those four tasks include accepting the reality of the loss, working through to the pain of grief, adjusting to a new environment, and withdrawing emotional energy from the loss and placing it in another relationship or situation.

Accepting the Reality of the Loss

The first task persons must complete is accepting the reality of the loss, whether it be that of divorce of parents, death of a sibling, or loss as a result of moving. In these cases, the individuals suffering the loss must come to the reality that their parents will no longer be together, that their sibling is dead and will not return, or that they will no longer live geographically close to their friends. Some individuals experience denial in this stage. This makes it difficult to get through this stage of the mourning process. Common types of denial include denying the

facts of the loss, denying the meaning of the loss, and denying that death is irreversible (Worden, 1991). Worden also stressed that fully completing this task takes time.

Working Through the Pain of Grief

When Worden (1991) indicated that working through the pain of grief is the second task, he was referring not only to emotional pain, but to behavioral and physical pain as well. The physical and mental well-being of individuals who do not work through and acknowledge their pain can be affected (Lock, 1994). Bowlby (1980) explained that if persons avoid the pain at the time of the loss, they could later experience some form of depression. Worden also suggested that avoiding painful thoughts and feelings can hinder the mourning process and can keep adolescents from completing the second task.

Adjusting to a New Environment

The way in which persons adjust to a new environment depends on what their relationship was like with the loss, whether that be a person or an object (Worden, 1991). Adjusting to a new environment also holds different meanings for different people. For example, if an adolescent's parent died, he or she would have to begin adjusting to the environment without his or her parent. This could possibly mean the loss of a cook, cleaning and laundry person, spending money, someone to watch his or her ball games or extra-curricular activities, someone to talk to, and/or someone to help with homework. Adolescents who graduate from high school and go to college may feel loss from no longer having family and friends close by. They may also feel loss because they no longer have the sense of security

they may have experienced from attending high school with the same individuals and teachers.

When persons experience a loss, they often have to develop new skills and take on new roles (Worden, 1991). Often times, individuals resent having to do this. For example, students who go off to college for the first time may have to get a job to support themselves, learn to cook, do their own laundry, and clean up after themselves. In addition to this, they may have to make new friends and assume new roles in their relationships.

Withdrawing and Reinvesting Emotional Energy

Worden (1991) identified the last task of mourning as withdrawing emotional energy from the loss and finding an effective place to put it so the individual suffering the loss can continue on with his or her life after the loss. Perhaps the adolescent who has gone off to college could reinvest his or her emotional energy in new relationships. Locke (1994) noted that persons reinvesting their emotional energy into other relationships or situations can be fearful of another loss occurring. Worden described a girl whose father died. The completion of the fourth task occurred when she realized she could reinvest her energy by loving other people and loving her father simultaneously. When individuals are not able to reinvest their emotional energy and hold on to their past loss, the mourning process is delayed.

There is no set time limit as to when the mourning process should be complete (Worden, 1991). Worden stressed that "mourning is finished when the tasks of

mourning are accomplished" (p. 18). Mourning is complete when the individual suffering the loss can take their emotional energy from the loss and place it into life.

Feelings Associated With Loss

Adolescents may experience several feelings when dealing with loss. Glass (1991) contended that those feelings include anger, fear, sadness, guilt, depression, and helplessness. According to Morganett (1990), it is important that adolescents recognize and understand the feelings they have regarding the loss.

Staudacher (1991) claimed that feelings are common in many types of loss; however, they are expressed in different ways. Often feelings are expressed according to an individual's religious beliefs, cultural norms, and gender. There are various ways of grieving according to specific cultures (Stroebe, 1992). In the case of death, Navajo people are allowed to show feelings of loss for one to four days after the death. After that, they are not to show signs of or speak of personal feelings of loss. Contrary to the Navajo culture, Egyptians are allowed by their cultural norms to dwell on their feelings of pain and sorrow for more than a year after a loved one has died. Concerning gender, Staudacher (1991) contended that men in Western culture are discouraged from openly expressing many feelings of loss. They are expected to resolve their grief on their own. Despite cultural, religious, and gender differences, there are many feelings common to loss: anger, sadness, guilt, and depression.

Anger

Morganett (1990) noted that it is normal to feel angry when a person loses something. According to Glass (1991), anger gives adolescents a sense of power

to counteract their feelings of helplessness and fright. When a parent of an adolescent dies, the adolescent could be very angry at the parent for leaving him or her at such a young age and for having to make so many changes in order to live without them. Adolescents whose parents are divorcing may be angry with their parents for not staying together or at themselves because they may believe they caused the break-up. It is important for adolescents to acknowledge and work through the anger associated with loss (Morganett, 1990).

Sadness

Sadness, to some degree, accompanies all types of loss. Intense sadness may be experienced by adolescents as they long for what is lost (Glass, 1991), whether it is for their mother to come alive again, their parents to get back together, their relationship with their boyfriend or girlfriend to be the way it used to be, or for them to move back where all of their friends live. Glass also suggested that when adolescents begin to see the future and are able to visualize the effects of the loss, they become sad. Worden (1991) claimed that the amount or degree of sadness a person feels about a loss is related to how attached that person was to the lost object or relationship.

According to Glass (1991), counselors assist adolescents experiencing loss. He suggested that counselors help normalize their sadness and give them opportunity to express this emotion. Counselors should also be encouraging and hopeful toward the adolescents. Glass also noted the importance of assuring adolescents that even though their sadness and pain is intense now, it will lessen some time in the future.

Guilt

Guilt is a common emotion associated with loss, particularly with death and divorce (Glass, 1991). Lawther and Oehmen (1985) emphasized that adolescents often feel guilty after a loved one has died because they did not spend much time with that person due to their normal rebelliousness and withdrawal from the family. They may regret not telling the deceased they loved them more often. Adolescents sometimes feel responsible for the death or divorce, which results in guilt. Worden (1991) indicated that a lot of guilt is irrational. For example, it is irrational for adolescents to feel guilty about their parents' divorce because nothing they said or did caused the divorce. Counselors can help these individuals dispute their irrational beliefs.

Depression

Adolescents who experience a loss that causes a deep and lasting feeling of sadness can become depressed (Morganett, 1991). Depression is generally associated with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, separation anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed by stressful life events such as death or divorce (Newman & Newman, 1991). According to Hart (1991), the following are signs of depression for early adolescents: decrease in motivation, difficulty with peers, behavior problems, poor school performance, low self-esteem, problems concentrating and thinking clearly, social withdrawal, changes in sleeping and eating habits, and irritability. Downing (1988) expressed the importance of assessing the level of severity regarding adolescent depression.

Characteristics of Adolescents Suffering Loss

Parkes (1986) characterized bereavement as a psychosocial transition. Three components make up the process of this transition: preoccupation with thoughts of the lost person in the desire to search for the deceased, "worry work" or painful repetitious recollection of the loss experience, and the attempt to make sense of the loss. The following are characteristics from a school perspective: frequently missing class, not completing assignments, completing poorer quality work than usual, exhibiting rebellious behavior, and withdrawing into depressions (Glass, 1991). Glass suggested that if adolescents do not display grieving characteristics following the death of a loved one, they are likely repressing their emotions while attempting to comfort others who are grieving. Feelings associated with loss affect school work, performance, and behavior; play and social time; relationships with friends and family; and thoughts about self (Glass, 1991). Thompson (1993) added that each person can be affected differently by the loss depending on the individual's relationship with that person or object. She also identified the following characteristics of grieving adolescents: irritability, sleep disturbance, anxiety, startle reaction, nausea, headache, difficulty concentrating, confusion, fear, guilt, withdrawal, anger, and reactive depressions.

Describing Grief Through Counseling

Counseling helps adolescents work through their loss issues. This is often done by educating adolescents, normalizing their feelings, and showing them that they are not crazy (Glass, 1991). The goals of counseling are to assist adolescents in completing tasks which may have remained unfinished and to help them work through their grief so that they may come to a resolution (Stroebe, 1992).

Additional goals of counseling include helping grieving adolescents manage their physical, cognitive, and emotional responses to the death of a loved one; creating a supportive environment; and discussing ways of coping with loss (Thompson, 1993).

In the remainder of this paper, two sample groups will be described, one focusing on loss from death, and the other on loss from divorce. Next, various group and individual interventions for all types of loss will be discussed. Finally, the counselor's role and agespecific variations will be described.

Group Counseling

In order to develop group interventions for adolescents experiencing loss, one must first determine who would benefit from the experience (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). Several ways of gathering this information are to ask parents, teachers, administrators, nurses, secretaries, or other counselors to help identify students who would benefit from a loss group.

Once one has knowledge of who might benefit from a grief group, it is important to interview or screen potential group members (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). Moore and Herlihy suggested that counselors point out during the interview that there are no time tables, sequences, or reactions to recovery, but each person's loss is individual. They also emphasized keeping the group size rather small, approximately six to eight members. Moore and Herlihy reminded counselors to obtain permission from all parents before beginning the group. This allows open communication among the members, their parents, and the counselor. Group counseling can provide an intimate network for adolescents as well as an

open atmosphere for them to talk about their loss experience and a variety of activities that allow a time and place to process their feelings with others who have had similar experiences.

Grief Group: Death of Friend or Family Member

The following is a seven-session group sample for adolescents coping with the death of a loved one. These sessions are based on information from Moore & Herlihy (1993) and Thompson (1993).

Session #1. Moore and Herlihy (1993) and Thompson (1993) agreed that the first session of the group should be designated for reviewing group rules and group goals as well as having members share the facts of the death or loss, their roles and relationship to that person or object, and any circumstances surrounding the event. To end the first session, these authors suggested that the group complete some relaxation or guided imagery so that the members do not return to their normal schedule in an upset state.

Session #2. The second session should be devoted to educating the members about the stages of bereavement and loss (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). In this session, the group members primarily discuss depression and acceptance. According to Moore and Herlihy, this helps normalize members' feelings of depression. In order for the members to see progress, they generally distribute the Grief Resolution Inventory worksheet at the end of the session.

Being able to discuss and share feelings about the death or loss experience in a nonjudgemental, supportive, and understanding atmosphere is helpful for grieving adolescents (Thompson, 1993). Thompson said this also encourages members to

talk about their feelings of responsibility regarding the event. It is important during this session that no one is left out of or dominates the discussion.

Session #3. To begin the third session, the group members share the original event of the death and then expand on it (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). Most commonly, the discussion extends to the funeral or returning to school and seeing the reaction of their peers after the funeral. It is during this session that members are given the opportunity to share incidents they felt good about and events that brought hurt or anger with others who have had a similar experience.

Session #4. During the fourth session group members focus on how relationships and roles change as a result of the loss (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). For example, when the loss is parental death, issues that frequently come up in this session include parental dating, shifting positions in the family, blending families, new responsibilities, and gender issues. The member's role in the family and his or her relationship with other family members changes as a result of these issues. For example, the role may change by having increased responsibility at home, and the relationship with the living parent could change if that parent begins dating. This session gives members a chance to discuss these issues and their feelings about them.

Session #5. Moore and Herlihy (1993) and Thompson (1993) believed that during the fifth session the group members benefit from sharing memories about the deceased, especially those from holidays and rituals. They also suggested that members express and discuss their concerns and fears about how to cope during the holidays. Visiting with someone who has been through the holidays without a loved one is something Moore & Herlihy encouraged. They saw this as being very

comforting to members. According to Thompson, sharing these memories and concerns lessens tension and enhances emotional bonding among group members.

Session #6. Thompson's (1993) objectives for the session prior to closure were to teach the members new coping skills and to help them recognize that others have similar feelings and experiences. Thompson also stated that it is during this session that the counselor must be responsible for being alert to any unfinished business. If this should happen, the counselor should either refer the individual or counsel him or her on an individual basis.

Session #7. The final session is when closure generally takes place. During this session, Moore and Herlihy (1993) suggested that each member evaluate the group experience. Moore and Herlihy also said that many times members wish to continue the group, but it is healthy for them to take a break after several weeks of intense emotion.

Grief Group: Parental Separation or Divorce

Divorce is just one of the many types of loss, other than death, that adolescents may experience. According to U.S. Census Bureau (cited in Morganett, 1990), half of the divorces that occur involve minor children, with over one million youth affected each year. Thomas and Rudolph (1992) stressed that this type of loss accelerates other losses such as familiar environment and lifestyle, as well as the loss of a parent. The rejection and disappointment adolescents feel as a result of parental divorce can lead to at-risk behaviors: early use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, and poor school performance. When these at-risk behaviors are not handled appropriately, they can create more serious maladaptive behaviors such as chemical dependency or school failure (Thomas & Rudolph, 1992). Counselors in

the group setting help adolescents normalize their feelings about the divorce. Members realize that they are not alone in this situation. The following is an eight-session group sample for adolescents coping with the divorce of their parents designed by Morganett (1990).

Session #1. Morganett (1990) designated the first session to members getting acquainted with each other and to defining the group rules. During this session, the group members discuss how living in a divorced family is like being in a storm. This allows them to talk about their feelings regarding the divorce. It is important to remind the members that even most negative situations have some positive aspects to them. This session ends with the members brainstorming positive aspects of the divorce.

Session #2. The purpose of the second session is for the members to learn the terminology associated with divorce and to become more comfortable expressing this information to others. Morganett (1990) noted that this session is an ideal time to explain to the members that other members have stressors similar to theirs.

Once the members learn terminology such as biological father, step-mother, step-sibling, and half sibling, they draw the individuals who live with them and their biological parent, as well as the individuals who live with their other biological parent. Once they have drawn this, they label each person using correct terminology and introduce their families to the group members.

Session #3. To begin the third session, the members describe their new living situation (Morganett, 1990). Some may live with their custodial parent and visit the noncustodial parent on weekends, some may live with grandparents, and some may live with the custodial parent and see their noncustodial parent very rarely. It

is wise to expect a variety of living situations. After the members describe their new living situation, they draw a picture of the house or apartment they live in most frequently. Some may wish to draw the floor plan of their room and add some personal prized possession as well. The members tape their pictures on the wall and look at one another's drawings. The group ends with a discussion of the different types of living arrangements.

Session #4. Each member presents his or her ideas about the divorce during the fourth session. Through discussing their ideas, they realize that different people have different views about divorce. After sharing their ideas about divorce, they complete a divorce idea scale individually. As a group, they discuss each item on the scale. They may see that their views are similar and/or different than those of other group members. The session is closed by a discussion initiated by the leader. The discussion includes the fact that their parents are responsible for their own thoughts and behaviors, therefore they are not responsible for the divorce of their parents.

Session #5. During the fifth session, members have the opportunity to express their feelings about the divorce. So that members can take responsibility for their feelings and realize that no one makes them feel a certain way, they sit in a circle and share how they are feeling at that time and add "and I take responsibility for that" at the end of the statement. Each member is given a feeling chart, and the leader points out that there are several major feelings in three different intensities: high, moderate, and low. Morganett (1990) indicated that the leader should explain that expressing negative emotions is as important as expressing positive

ones. At last, the leader reads a scenario related to divorce, and the members react to how they would feel in this situation and what might happen if they did not express those feelings.

Session #6. The purpose of this session is for the members to begin thinking about other family members' thoughts and feelings about the divorce. The members role play a situation related to divorce wearing clothes their character would wear. For example, a member playing the role of a mother might wear a skirt and blouse. Each student plays a character in a role play situation during this session. Once everybody has role played, the members' thoughts and feelings regarding those situations as well as what they believe to be the thoughts and feelings of their family members are discussed.

Session #7. Self-confidence is the focus of this session. Members write down what they like about themselves or do well at in the following categories: the person I am, friends, schoolwork, hobbies/sports, and family. The group members can also add categories. Acting as a model, the leader looks into a mirror saying three things he or she likes about himself or herself. The mirror is then passed on to a volunteer who does the same. Once the member has noted three positive aspects about himself or herself, other members contribute three more about that person.

Session #8. Morganett's (1990) objectives for the final session are for the members to share something they have learned in the group and to begin closure. The leader points out that all relationships come to an end at some time, whether

it be by moving away, a mutual decision, or other reasons. Each member makes a good-bye card from construction paper. All cards are passed to every member so they have the opportunity to sign it and make a note on it if they wish.

Individual and Group Interventions For All Types of Loss

The following are eight single interventions for adolescents coping with loss. These interventions can be utilized in a group or individual setting and include journaling, family tree, music, bibliotherapy, memory book, balloon lift, focusing on feelings, and feeling game.

Journaling

Many interventions are suitable for both an individual or group setting. For example, Kandt (1994) suggested that journaling is an effective intervention in either setting. Kandt defined journaling as "writings centered on ideas and internal events" (p. 209). An individual could write spontaneously about the loss he or she feels regarding a death or a transition from high school to college, whereas members of a group could journal about a specific theme each week geared toward the type of loss they are working through.

Family Tree

Drawing a family tree is a useful intervention when working with adolescents who are dealing with loss (Kandt, 1994). To fill the tree, the counselor asks several questions about the adolescent's family members' ages, marriages, divorces, deaths, funerals, and who has been helping the adolescent with his or her loss issues. According to Warmbrod (1986), the family tree helps the counselor discover the adolescent's background and loss history. The adolescent could

utilize this intervention individually and share the information with the counselor, or it could be used within the group setting and shared with other group members.

Music

Music is also a good intervention because so many adolescents listen to music. Adolescents can find a song they believe describes how they feel about the loss or grief they are feeling (Vernon, 1995). They can then go on to describe what the song means to them and how it relates to their situation and feelings. Another way to use music as an intervention is to have the adolescent compose a song and put it to music, or rap it. In either a group or individual setting, the adolescent could choose which he or she would like to do.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy can also be used effectively with adolescents (Vernon, 1995). They can find a book that describes feelings and situations that are similar to their feelings and situation. This may help normalize their feelings. Often times counselors can suggest a book for adolescents to read that relates to their loss. In a group setting, group members can discuss how their experience is similar or different than that of the character(s) in the book. In an individual setting, the adolescent can write about how he or she is similar or different than the character(s) in the book, or he or she could discuss it with the counselor.

Memory Book

For an adolescent or a group of adolescents dealing with the death of a loved one, Kandt (1994) suggested making a memory book. Kandt described a memory book as " a scrapbook assembled with photos, poems, letters, buttons, and various other memorabilia given to the adolescent by the deceased" (p. 210). She also said

that this intervention is beneficial to adolescents because it provides them with a concrete object connecting them to the deceased. An individual could share his or her memory book with the counselor as well as friends and family, and a group of adolescents could share their books with each other, eliciting group process.

Balloon Lift

Another intervention Kandt (1994) deemed appropriate for adolescents grieving the death of a loved one is a balloon lift. To complete this intervention, the adolescents write notes to the deceased expressing things they want to say to that person. They then attach the note to a helium balloon. When they are ready, they release the balloon into the air. It is important that the adolescents be given enough time to process before releasing the balloon. This intervention gives them some finality to the grieving process. The balloon lift can take place at the grave site, the site of the loss, or a special place chosen by the adolescent (Kandt, 1994).

Focusing on Feelings

Allowing adolescents to talk about their feelings associated with the loss is an intervention Morganett (1990) recommended. The adolescents would have an open discussion with other group members and/or the counselor about their feelings associated with the loss. Once the feelings are mentioned, they can then be written on a chalkboard or chart paper for later discussion.

Feeling Game

An additional intervention dealing with feelings is a feeling game. The counselor can make a board game with several color coded feeling faces drawn in the center of the board. For instance, the sad face might be colored green, while the anger face is colored red. Along the outside of the board, the counselor can

draw several spaces arbitrarily colored, matching the colors of the faces. When the adolescent lands on a red mark, for example, he or she would describe an aspect of the loss or grief that is angering him or her. This game is more effective with a group of adolescents because one individual cannot play the game alone unless the counselor plays with the individual.

Role of the Counselor in Individual and Group Counseling

When assisting adolescents coping with any type of loss, the role of the counselor is quite complex. First of all, the counselor who helps adolescents coping with loss should be comfortable talking about the type of loss the adolescent is dealing with (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). The following are specific suggestions that Moore and Herlihy gave to counselors: (a) it is sometimes helpful when laughter and humor are included; (b) it is important that the counselor refrain from becoming too emotionally involved; (c) it is necessary that both the counselor and the students know that grieving is an individual process and there is no time table (Glass, 1991); (d) and it is comforting for students to have group in a familiar setting with friends.

Secondly, counselors play the role of an educator while conducting groups or working individually with adolescents (Glass, 1991). There are a number of aspects to educate adolescents about concerning loss issues. First, it is beneficial to take a student's importance of loss and developmental stage into account. These factors help determine how and what education should be taught. Second, it is helpful for students to know that their feelings as well as high and low moments are normal. Counselors should encourage students to take breaks from grieving because it is very hard work. Students may need to be reminded to eat

properly, get sufficient sleep, and exercise. They must take care of themselves physically in order to be emotionally well. When the loss is a result of a death, counselors should assure adolescents that memories can never be taken away, and that even though this experience is very painful now, it will become less painful as time passes (Kandt, 1994).

Third, it is the counselors job to assess the clients' coping abilities by the end of their sessions together (Thompson, 1993). Thompson said that in order to assess students, the counselor must complete the following steps: examine whether initial stress symptoms have lowered, judge whether or not each member has gained increased coping ability, and determine if members have high levels of relating to others and the environment.

Age-Specific Variations

Children, adolescents, and adults do not process death and loss the same because they are not developmentally able to do so. Even though children and adolescents may have the same feelings regarding a particular loss as adults, they may not be able to express these feelings as clearly as adults can. Before a counselor can implement a counseling intervention and expect it to be effective, he or she must be cognizant of the client's developmental level.

Adolescents, according to Wigtil & Wigtil, (cited in Vernon, 1993) believe that death is irreversible. Toews, Martin, and Prosen (1985) claimed that adolescents have a mature conception of death, including its universality, nonfunctionality, and irreversibility. Glass (1991) suggested that even though adolescents see death as irreversible and universal, they see their own death as nowhere near the immediate future. This is what Glass believes distinguished

adolescents from adults. Adults are aware that death is irreversible, universal, and that their own death could occur in the near future from one cause or another.

Conclusion

Adolescents not only experience loss by the death of a loved one, the most common form of loss, but also loss due to broken friendships, moving, parental divorce, the break-up of a romantic relationship, and high school graduation. According to the results of the previously mentioned study conducted by Glass (1991), it is evident that many adolescents are indeed experiencing these types of loss.

It is apparent that the many adolescents who are attempting to cope with grief and loss issues are having a difficult time. Not surprisingly, these issues are affecting them cognitively, behaviorally, physically, and emotionally. Sometimes talking with a friend or family member about the issue is not enough. Frequently adolescents can be better served through individual or group counseling. Counseling provides adolescents support to help ease the pain of the loss as well as time to process their feelings about the loss. In planning interventions, it is important that the counselor is aware of and sensitive to the individual's developmental level and where the adolescent is in the mourning process. It is also the counselor's job to plan appropriate interventions that are well suited to the group or individual's needs.

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