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## How to Support Youth Exposed to Trauma and Traumatic Loss

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## Commercial Disclosures

**Books:**

Saltzman, Layne, Pynoos, Olafson, Kaplow, & Boat (2017). *Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents: A Modular Approach to Treating Traumatized and Bereaved Youth*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaplow, Layne, Pynoos, & Saltzman (2023). *Multidimensional Grief Therapy: A Flexible Approach to Assessing and Supporting Bereaved Youth*. Cambridge University Press.

**Assessment Tools:**

Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos (2022). *Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) Checklist – Youth Version 1.0*. Behavioral Health Innovations, LLC.

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## Overview

- Overview of how trauma presents in children
- Overview of how grief presents in children
- Core practice elements for addressing traumatic loss
- Questions/Discussion

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## The Four Pillars of the Trauma and Grief Center

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DEVELOPMENT	TRAINING	RESEARCH	POLICY
of evidence-based assessments and interventions for youth who have experienced traumas and/or losses	and professional education in trauma and bereavement-related topics and interventions	on children's needs and strengths in response to trauma and loss, and on treatment effectiveness	recommendations based upon trauma- and bereavement-informed best practices

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# Overview of Childhood Trauma

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## What is Trauma?

The experience of a real or perceived threat  
to life or bodily integrity

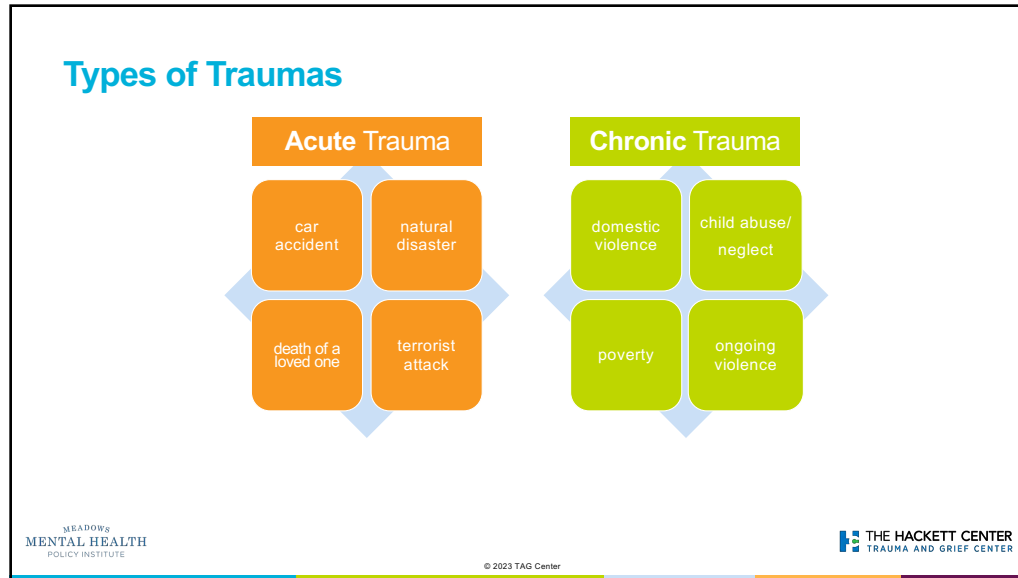
OR

the life or bodily integrity of a loved one

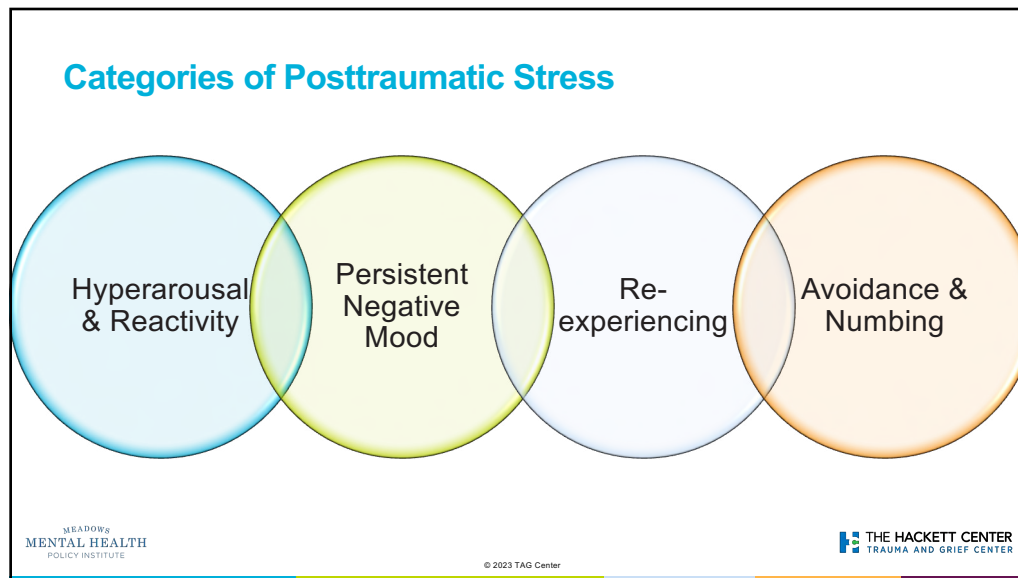
AND

causes an overwhelming sense of terror,  
horror, helplessness, and fear

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**Posttraumatic stress is a *normal* response to an *abnormal* event.**

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**Traumatic stress reactions in children can look like...**

```
graph TD; A[Anxiety] --> B[ADHD]; B --> C[Depression]; C --> D[Conduct Problems]; D --> E[Physical Illness];
```

**Anxiety**  
Fear and worry about the safety of self, family, friends

**ADHD**  
Increased activity level, decreased concentration

**Depression**  
Increased irritability, changes in sleep, lack of interest/pleasure in doing things

**Conduct Problems**  
Aggression, angry outbursts

**Physical Illness**  
Aches and pains with no medical explanation, frequent doctor visits

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What's ~~WRONG~~ with that child?

**What HAPPENED to**  
**that child?**

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**Longer Term Consequences of Unaddressed Trauma**

- Smaller brain volume
- Depression
- Suicide risk
- School problems
- Problems with peer relations
- Substance/drug abuse
- Violent behavior
- Intergenerational transmission of trauma/traumatic stress



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# Overview of Childhood Bereavement/Grief

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**Bereavement**  
experience of deprivation or loss by death

**Grief**  
psychological or behavioral response arising from bereavement

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## Why Focus on Bereavement?



**Most frequently reported type of trauma in clinic-referred youth**

*(Pynoos et al., 2014)*



**Most common form of trauma worldwide**

*(Burns et al., 2020)*



**Most distressing form of trauma among adults and youth in the general population**

*(Breslau et al., 2004; Kaplow, Saunders, Angold, & Costello, 2010)*



**Strongest predictor of poor school outcomes above and beyond any other form of trauma**

*(Oosterhoff, Kaplow, & Layne, 2018)*

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**Children's grief reactions  
(not simply bereavement) play an important role  
in future psychological functioning.**

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## Important Facts about Grief

- ❖ Most bereaved children will go on to lead healthy, happy, productive lives.
- ❖ There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve.
- ❖ There is no set timeline for grief.
- ❖ Grief is not a “problem” to be fixed. It is a natural part of life and a reflection of the love we have for the person who died.

## How Do Children Typically Grieve?

- “Typical” grief reactions are hard to define
- Very few large studies of bereaved children... even fewer studies of bereaved children followed over time, even fewer with diverse populations
- Grief reactions influenced by:
  - ❖ developmental level
  - ❖ previous life experiences
  - ❖ relationship to deceased
  - ❖ culture
  - ❖ religious/spiritual beliefs
  - ❖ family
  - ❖ social environment
  - ❖ cause of death



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  - ❖ religious/spiritual beliefs
  - ❖ family
  - ❖ social environment
  - ❖ cause of death



## What does death mean to toddlers/preschoolers?

### 2-5 years old:

- Experience sense of “gone-ness”
- Often believe that death is reversible
- Struggle with body’s lack of functioning
- Play out aspects of death



## What does death mean to young school-aged children?



### 6-9 years old:

- Struggle with concepts of body vs. soul
- See death as something tangible or physical
- Worry about surviving caregivers

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## What does death mean to older school-aged children?

### 10-12 years old:

- Better able to grasp concept of body vs. spirit
- May believe that their own actions caused the death
- More realistic about permanency of death, which is why we start to see more psychological distress in this age group



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## What does death mean to adolescents?



### 13-18 years old:

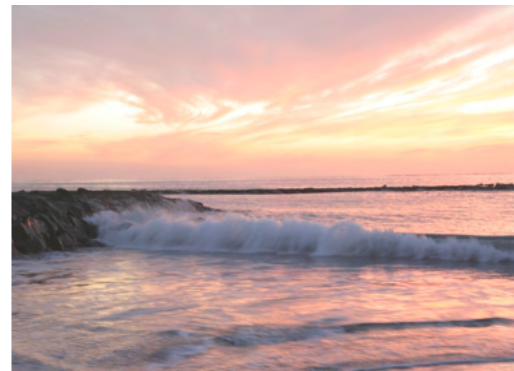
- Struggle with larger life questions (why me?)
- May test own mortality with risk-taking behaviors
- More likely to develop psychiatric symptoms given understanding of death
- Greater focus on how death will affect own future

## Typical Grief Reactions

Can be very intense (pining, yearning, sadness, anger or protest over the loss).

Are often at least temporarily associated with decreased functioning.

Typically transition from pain to more pleasant reminiscing over time.



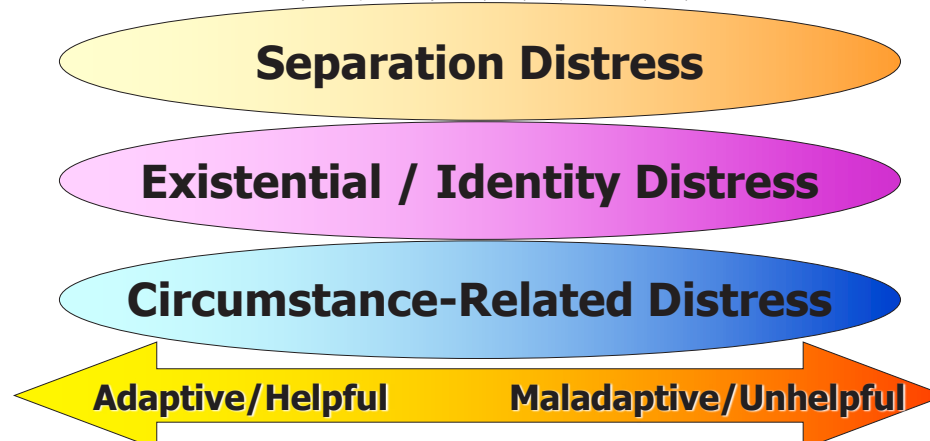
## Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)

- For diagnosis of a child, the death had to have occurred at least 6 months ago, symptoms have to be present for at least a month and be intense enough to cause impairment.
- Approximately 10-20% of bereaved youth in the U.S. develop PGD.
- Rates are closer to 20% among youth exposed to homicide.
- Informed by Multidimensional Grief Theory.

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## Multidimensional Grief Theory

Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos (2011); Kaplow et al. (2013)



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## A multidimensional framework is important because...

Distinct dimensions of grief may:

- ❖ Be more prominent at certain developmental stages
- ❖ May not be present in all bereaved populations
- ❖ Require different treatment components (i.e., different therapeutic activities to address different grief domains)

## Grief in the Context of Ambiguous Loss

Boss, 1999

**Ambiguous loss** differs from ordinary loss in that

- No verification of death (e.g., person is missing)
- No certainty that the person will come back
- No guarantee things will return to the way they used to be

### Two types of ambiguous loss:

- Loved one is physically missing
- Loved one is psychologically absent (i.e., emotionally or cognitively missing)

## Experiences of Grief and Loss Among Military Youth

Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman et al., 2013

Experiences of both types of *ambiguous loss*:

### Loved one is physically missing

*Loved one is deployed; has little to no contact with family.  
No certainty of reunification.*

### Loved one is psychologically/emotionally absent

*Loved ones may be emotionally unavailable upon return due to PTSD and/or grief.  
No certainty that things will "return to normal."*



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## Grief Reactions in Response to Ambiguous Loss: Multidimensional Grief Theory

Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman et al., 2013

Common *grief reactions* may include:

- **Separation Distress:** preoccupation with the person's absence; yearning and longing  
*Loneliness, fantasies of reunification, anger, protest, uncertainty  
"When is Dad coming back? When can I see him again?"*
- **Existential Distress:** struggle with one's identity or feeling lost without the person  
*Feeling different from others; pessimistic outlook on life; identity crisis  
"No one understands what this is like. I feel like I don't really know who I am anymore."*
- **Circumstance-Related Distress:** preoccupation with the experience of deployment or what made the person go missing  
*Unable to move forward due to uncertainty of the circumstances; anger; distress; desires for revenge  
"I feel like he's just going to walk through the door."*

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## Links between bereavement and suicide risk

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### Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide in the context of bereavement

#### Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTs; Joiner, 2005)

Thwarted belongingness – sense of loneliness and perceived lack of support.

Perceived burdensomeness – one has become a drain on the resources of others.

#### Thwarted belongingness (Hill et al., 2019)

"Nobody understands me. No one knows what this is like."

"People think I'm weird because I don't have a mom anymore."

"Anyone I get close to dies – I shouldn't get close to anyone anymore."

#### Perceived burdensomeness (Hill et al., 2019)

"Mom starts to cry every time I mention how much I miss Dad."

"If I had been better behaved in school, Mom wouldn't have been so stressed and had a heart attack."

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## Distinguishing PTSD from Grief:

A difference that makes a difference

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### Why distinguish PTSD from grief?

PTSD and grief are not the same thing

- ✓ Have different precipitating factors (e.g., trauma versus loss reminders)
- ✓ Have different physiological effects
- ✓ Require different assessment tools
- ✓ Require different practice elements

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## Trauma and Loss Reminders

Layne, Warren, et al. 2006

### Trauma Reminders

- Images, sounds, smells, people, situations that remind child of the traumatic event
- Often lead to PTSD or circumstance-related distress

### Loss Reminders

- Images, sounds, smells, people, situations that remind child of the absence of the person who died
- Often lead to grief reactions

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## How to Support Grieving Youth Using Evidence-Based Practices

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## Evidence-Based Interventions for Grief and Traumatic Loss

Review of studies examining effectiveness of interventions for bereaved youth  
(Kaplow, Layne, & Pynoos, 2019)

### Group-based treatments

Family Bereavement Program (Sandler et al., 2013)  
Grief and Trauma Intervention (Salloum, 2008)  
Trauma and Grief Component Therapy (Saltzman et al., 2017)

### Individual treatments

Grief-Help (Boelen et al., 2006)  
TF-CBT for Childhood Traumatic Grief (Cohen et al., 2017)  
Multidimensional Grief Therapy (Hill et al., 2019; Kaplow et al., 2023)

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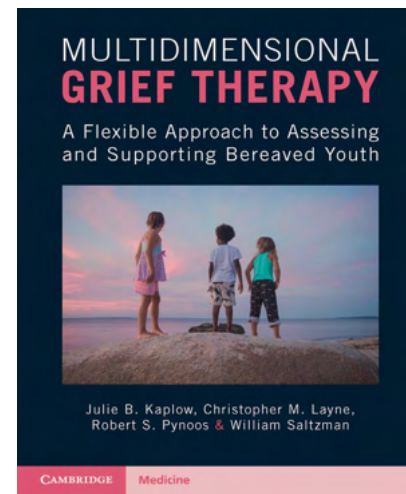
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## Multidimensional Grief Therapy

- An assessment-driven intervention based on Multidimensional Grief Theory
- Promotes adaptive grief reactions and reduces unhelpful grief reactions
- First evidence-based, grief-focused intervention for children and adolescents that directly addresses the three primary domains of grief
- Addresses interplay between trauma and grief
- Provides a “continuum” of grief-informed care given its tiered approach
- Can be used individually or in groups

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## Phased Approach to MGT

Phase 1 (Tier 1): Learning About Grief	Phase 2 (Tier 2): Telling My Story of Loss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sessions 1-6</li> <li>Identify dimensions of grief</li> <li>Understand how grief changes over time</li> <li>Identify loss and potential trauma reminders</li> <li>Enhance emotion regulation and cognitive coping skills</li> <li>Can be administered by any caring adult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sessions 7-10</li> <li>Creation of loss narrative</li> <li>Focus on each dimension of grief</li> <li>Enhance ongoing connection, legacy-building and meaning-making</li> <li>Promote caregiver grief facilitation</li> <li>Typically administered by a mental health professional</li> </ul>

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## Treatment Effects on Psychological Distress (Alvis et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2019)

Significant reductions in symptoms of distress after receiving Phase I

- 40-47% decrease in symptoms after receiving Phase I of MGT

And after receiving Phase II

- Among youth who received Phase II, symptoms decreased an additional 22-44% from T2

Treatment effects were consistent across race, age, gender, and time since death.

**Grief Reaction**

- Circumstance Distress
- Ex/Identity Distress
- Separation Distress

Note: Red line represents cut off for clinically elevated symptoms

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# MGT Phase 1: Learning About Grief

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# Grief Psychoeducation: What is Grief?

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## MGT Session 1 Objectives

Increase the client's ability to:

- Identify grief reactions as healthy and normal; and there is no “right or wrong way” to grieve.
- Understand their own personal grief reactions.
- Distinguish between grief-related myths and facts.
- Develop their vocabulary for labeling and expressing grief reactions based upon Multidimensional Grief Theory.
- Communicate effectively with caregiver(s) about their grief.

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## True/False Game

Handout 1.1

Grief Statement Cards and True/False Cards

**It is normal to have many different types of grief-related feelings (for example, sad, angry, worried) at the same time.**

**After someone we care about dies, all kids get over their painful feelings after about 6-12 months.**

**It is best not to talk about the person who died – that way, it will be easier to move on with your life.**

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**Identifying Grief Reactions**

**Handout 1.2**  
Grief Character Cartoons and Grief Reaction Cards

I miss my person *so* much that I feel like crying *all* the time

No matter how hard I try, I just can't stop thinking about my person

It's really hard to get through the day without my person

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**Emotion Psychoeducation and Identification:  
What Am I Feeling and Why?**

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## MGT Session 2 Objectives

Increase the client's ability to:

- Describe feelings and emotions.
- Identify emotions by becoming aware of how they are experienced in the body.
- Regulate emotions.
- Tolerate (rather than avoid) painful emotions.

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## Feelings Faces

Handout 2.2

Feelings Faces

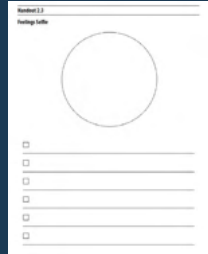


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# Demonstration

## Feelings Selfie



Worksheet 1.1  
Feelings Selfie

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# Grief Psychoeducation: How Has My Grief Changed Over Time?

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## MGT Session 3 Objectives

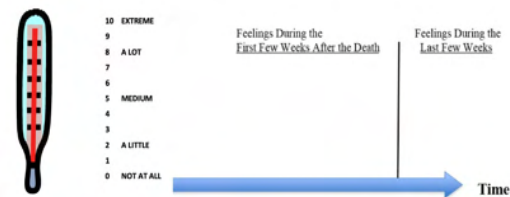
Increase the client's ability to:

- Normalize and validate grief reactions as healthy and universal.
- Expand their understanding of how grief reactions can change over time.
- Explore healthy ways in which they can feel “connected” to the deceased and potentially reduce grief-related distress.
- Explore their grief reactions over time and share with the caregiver(s) to facilitate understanding of family members' grief experiences.

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## Riding the Waves of Grief

### Riding the Waves of Grief (How Grief Changes Over Time)



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## Understanding Caregivers as Key Grief Facilitators: What Can My Caregiver Do To Support Me?

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## MGT Session 4 Objectives

Increase the client's ability to:

- View the caregiver (and family) as a resource with the understanding that “I don't have to do this alone.”
- Identify specific things that caregivers and family members can do when the client experiences painful grief reactions.
- Openly communicate with their caregiver regarding which specific behaviors at home are most helpful to the client, and which are least helpful.
- Identify and share healthy ways of feeling “connected” to the deceased, both individually and with the caregiver.

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## Caregiver Grief Facilitation

- “Positive parenting” (routines, positive reinforcement, active listening) associated with decreased distress in bereaved youth (Ayers et al., 2014; Sandler et al., 2013)
- Not so much about what you say, but what you do
- Specific caregiver behaviors associated with decreased maladaptive grief and depression in children (Shapiro et al., 2014; Wolchik et al., 2008):
  - Physical affection, hugs
  - Smiling
  - Consistent eye contact
  - Being “present”



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## Grief Facilitation Inventory (GFI)

Kaplow & Layne, 2012

Child and caregiver report of caregiver's behaviors theorized to help or hinder child's adaptive grief reactions

36 items developed, including:

- ❖ Frequency of memorializing activities
- ❖ Frequency of communication about the death
- ❖ Frequency of communication about the deceased person
- ❖ Sharing of spiritual beliefs
- ❖ Parental response to child's emotions
- ❖ Parental expression of his/her own emotions

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## Results: 4 Domains of Caregiver Grief Facilitation



Ongoing  
Connection

- 7 items
- *My caregiver tells me about good things I have in common with my \_\_\_.*



Existential  
Continuity  
& Support

- 8 items
- *My caregiver lets me know that I can still have a good life even though my \_\_\_ has died.*



Caregiver  
Grief  
Expression

- 4 items
- *My caregiver tells me how he/she is feeling about my \_\_\_'s death.*



Grief  
Inhibition/  
Avoidance

- 5 items
- *My caregiver tells me not to talk about how my \_\_\_ died with people outside of my family.*

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## What Helps Me Grieve

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**Handout 4.2**

**What Helps Me Grieve**

**Directions:** Using the results of the Grief Facilitation Inventory, write down the client's top five choices of caregiver behaviors that they feel are most helpful. Next, write down the client's top five choices of caregiver behaviors that make good grieving harder that they would like to have *more of or less of*. You can then use this worksheet to have an open discussion between the client and caregiver.

I Like It When:	I Wish I Could Change:
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

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## Understanding Loss Reminders and Trauma Reminders:

### What Reminds Me That They're No Longer Here?

### What Reminds Me of the Way They Died?

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## MGT Session 5 Objectives

Increase the client's ability to:

- Understand loss reminders and trauma reminders.
- Identify their own personal loss reminders and trauma reminders.
- Understand the ways in which specific loss reminders and trauma reminders affect the way they grieve and adjust to a death.
- Cope with different types of reminders, including anticipating reminders, learning to regulate intense emotions, and taking steps to reduce certain unhelpful reminders.

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## Reminders Sorting Card Game

Handout 5.1

Reminders Card Sorting Game

### Potential Loss Reminders

Hearing \_\_\_\_\_'s  
name

Certain dates or times  
of the year  
(anniversaries,  
birthdays, etc.)

Certain smells, sounds,  
or tastes

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## My Reminders

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**Handout 5.3**

**My Reminders**

My Loss Reminders <small>(Things that remind me my person <u>is</u> gone)</small>	My Trauma Reminders <small>(Things that remind me of <u>the</u> time my person died)</small>
1.  +    -	1.  +    -
2.  +    -	2.  +    -
3.  +    -	3.  +    -
4.  +    -	4.  +    -
5.  +    -	5.  +    -
Note: Have child circle whether the loss reminder results in positive (happy) feelings or negative (sad) feelings.	

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## Coping with Reminders

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**Handout 5.4**

**My Coping Toolkit**

During this session we talked about loss reminders and trauma reminders and how they can affect us. We also talked about different coping strategies we can use to help us when we are faced with our own personal reminders.

**Directions:** Pick one time this week when you faced a loss reminder or trauma reminder. What was it and how did it make you feel?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Using the table below, place a checkmark next to the coping strategy that you used when faced with a loss or trauma reminder this week. Next, rate how helpful that coping strategy was on a scale from 0 (not at all helpful) to 3 (very helpful).

Coping Strategy	Used	0 = Not at all helpful	1 = A little bit helpful	2 = Pretty helpful	3 = Very helpful
Breathing Exercises					
Calmself-Talk					
Preparing for Loss or Trauma Reminders					
Connecting with Friends or Family					
Doing Fun Activities					
Writing in a Journal					
Other					

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# Sizing Up a Situation: How Can Our Thoughts Change the Way We Feel and Act?

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PGS. 115-140

## MGT Session 6 Objectives

Increase the client's ability to:

- Distinguish between situations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Understand links between situations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Understand how situations involving loss or trauma reminders can lead to specific bereavement-related thoughts, feelings or behaviors.
- Identify their own helpful or hurtful thoughts and ways to manage them.

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## Sizing Up a Situation Card Game

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Handout 6.2

Sizing Up a Situation Card Game

Frustrated	I've got to get even	Someone hits you
Surprised	Scared	I can do it

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## Linking Hurtful Thoughts, Grief Reactions, and Consequences

- What is the situation?
- What is his/her hurtful thought?
- What negative feelings might this hurtful thought be bringing up?
- What behaviors might he/she be tempted to engage in if he is thinking and feeling this way?
- What are some likely harmful consequences of these behaviors?
- Can you help him/her think differently about the situation in a more constructive way? What are some more helpful thoughts that could replace his/her hurtful thoughts?

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## Linking Hurtful Thoughts, Grief Reactions, and Consequences

- Could you believe these new thoughts about what happened if you were in his/her situation?
- How could thinking about the situation in these more helpful ways change how he/she is feeling?
- How could these more helpful thoughts and feelings help him/her behave in more positive ways?
- What kinds of consequences are likely to follow if he/she chooses to have more helpful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about this situation?

## Creating the Loss Narrative: Telling the Story of My Person

## What is a Loss Narrative vs. a Trauma Narrative?

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## Trauma Processing

Trauma processing focuses on the death event itself.

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why

Designed to alleviate PTSS and some forms of circumstance-related distress

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## My Grief Story

Kaplow, Layne, Pynoos & Saltzman (2023)

- Chapter 1: All About \_\_\_ (SD)
- Chapter 2: What I Miss the Most (SD)
- Chapter 3: How I Stay Connected (SD)
- Chapter 4: How \_\_\_ Died (CRD)
- Chapter 5: Where Are They Now? (SD, EX)
- Chapter 6: How Things Have Changed (EX)
- Chapter 7: Making Meaning of the Death (EX)
- Chapter 8: My Life Now and My Life in the Future (EX)

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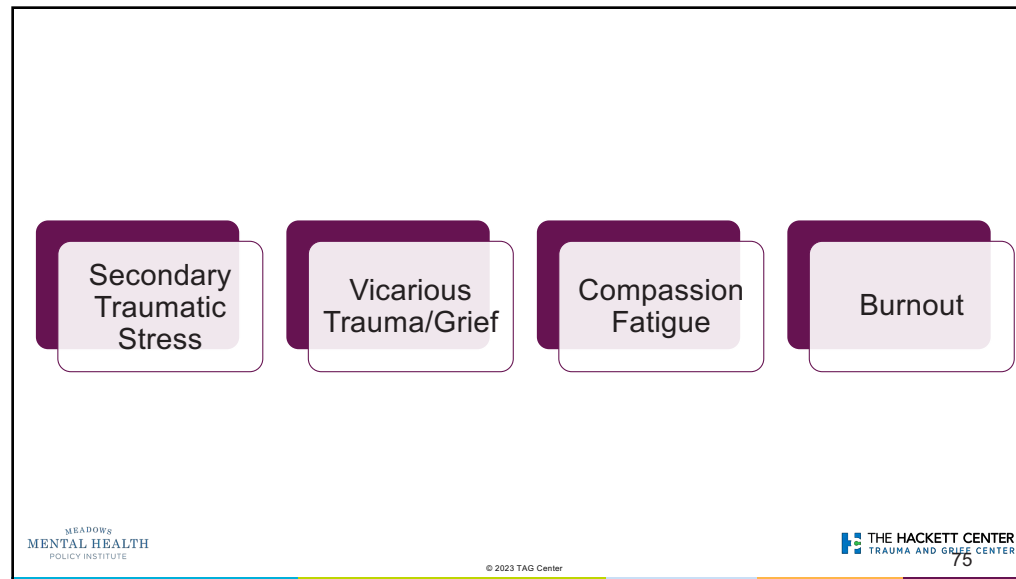
## The Cost of Caring

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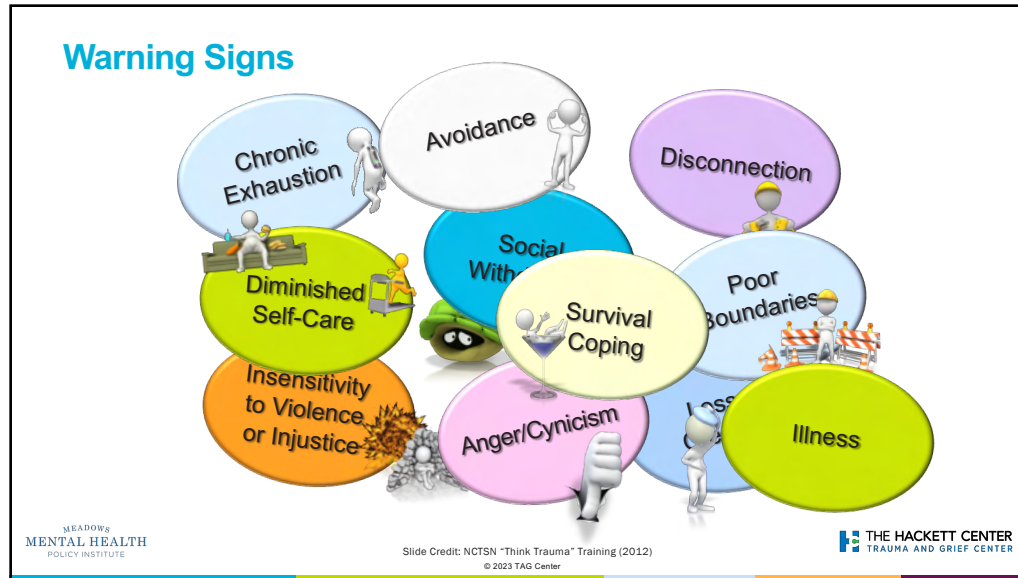
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## Understanding Who is at Risk

- Highly empathic individuals
- Those with history of trauma/loss
- Those with preexisting mental health issues
- Socially or organizationally isolated
- Shared social identity to victim(s)
- Frequent exposure to traumatic stories (including through media)



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## THE GOOD NEWS!

**Compassion Satisfaction =**  
Deriving pleasure from helping others

**Vicarious Resilience =**  
Positive transformation as a result of bearing witness to individuals overcoming adversity

**Vicarious Transformation =**  
Ongoing, internal process that results in a sense of connection with others, a greater appreciation in one's life, and a greater sense of meaning and hope.

**\*\*Routinely caring for yourself can help reduce the cost of caring and increase resilience.\*\***

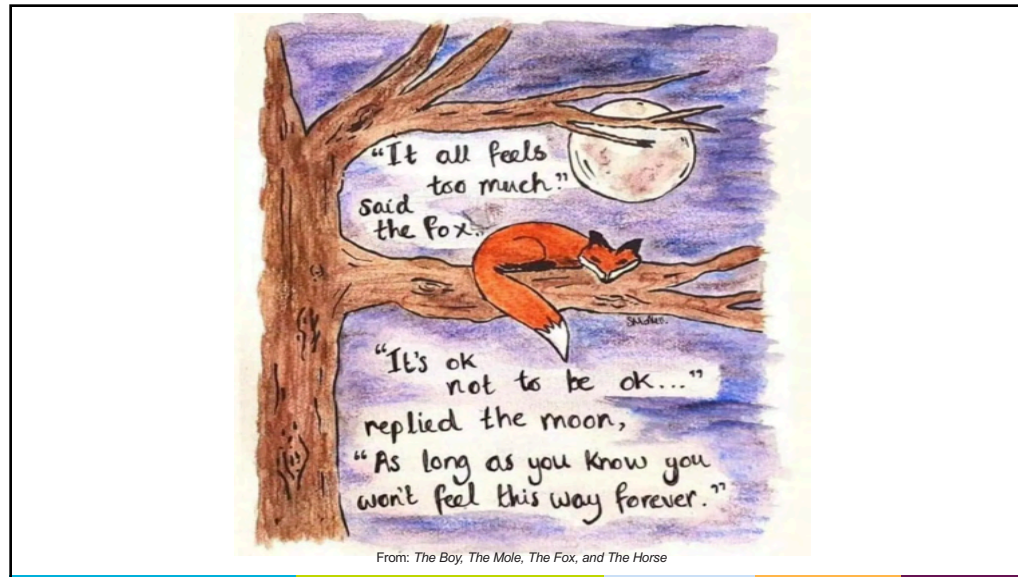
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Self-care is the ability to engage in helping others without sacrificing other important parts of one's life.







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### Virtual Learning Library

The Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center's Virtual Learning Library offers free webinars and resources focusing on childhood trauma and grief to key audiences: parents and caregivers, mental health clinicians, educators, health care providers, law enforcement, and other professionals working with children and adolescents who have experienced trauma and loss.

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The screenshot shows the homepage of the Trauma and Grief Center website. It includes a navigation menu, a search bar, a donate button, and a main section for the Virtual Learning Library with a descriptive paragraph and an image of hands clasped together.

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# Evidence-Based Risk Screening

## PGD Checklist - Short Form

(Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos, 2023)

- Total of 6 items (2 minutes to complete)
- Demonstrates high sensitivity (.87) and specificity (.83)
- Cut-off score of 9 is predictive of functional impairment.
- Items cover each of the dimensions of grief
- Can be administered in interview format or self-report
- To access the PGD-SF: tagcenter.org



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**For More Information and Trauma and Grief Resources**

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