

SUPPORT IN BEREAVEMENT: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR HELPING MOURNERS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Abstract: The process of passing loss and bereavement is a difficult period for any human being. At this particular time, it is important to remember to support the child in dealing with loss and grief. Unfortunately, it can happen that the closest environment, such as family and school is not able to help the mourner properly, especially the children and youth in this silent fight. Support from family and teachers is as needed as help from the various professionals. This article is a review of forms of support in bereaved children and youth, with emphasize on practical methods performed by educators. The paper includes the analysis of forms used in order to help bereaved children in returning to better function in society.

Keywords: bereavement, loss, support in bereavement, forms of support, therapy through science education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the cycle of human life there is a time of great joy connected to its beginnings and sorrow and sadness towards the end of life, dying and death. The grief after death of loved ones and the process of bereavement could be very difficult for all those who were close to the dead person. Losses could be cumulated after several departures of significant ones from family and friends. There are also griefs which are not recognized, postponed in front of difficulties or hidden, as with women who lost their unborn children (Krakowiak 2006). Here and in this article, we will stress the importance and will show how to remember about support of children and teenagers in dealing with loss, grief and bereavement. Young people could suffer grievously, not knowing about reasons of pain and unable to help themselves. Unfortunately, it often happens that the closest environment, such as family and school is not able to help the mourner, especially the young one in this silent fight. This article will try to explore the topic of different types of bereavement, showing main ways of support, touching various approaches, mentioning also the role of religion and spirituality in this process. We will recognize the role of a modern world of cyberspace and more traditional ways of support such as active participation in exercises and science lessons. Some ideas and methods will be also introduced here.

TYPES OF BEREAVEMENT

Each of us experiences loss in different phases of one's life. This feeling is accompanied by the death of a loved one: a parent, grandparent, siblings, or a friend, as well as loss of the beloved pet. The manner, in which a man experiences the process of mourning, undoubtedly depends on the circumstances of the death of that person. In a situation where death occurs suddenly, without any warning and early farewell, anger and regret are felt in relation to the person who could or should protect the deceased from death. However, even if death is a consequence of a long-lasting and serious illness, it is not easy for anybody to accept the loss. Often, despite the chance to prepare for the "inevitable", the possibility of saying goodbye to the patient and telling to him/her important

things, one experience long-lasting stress, anxiety and a sense of loneliness (Kinchin 2001).

According to Doka (1996; 2000) the process of passing on the loss of a close relative is closely related to the age of the young mourner. This does not mean, however, that the older or younger the child, the easier it is for him/her to survive the death of a loved one. A child up to 3 years old usually does not understand what disease and death is. However, he perfectly senses the change in the atmosphere prevailing among other household members. It can then become irritable, withdrawn, it can lose its appetite or soak in the night.

Webb (2010) writes that for children aged 3-5, this awareness of the disease is already greater because child is able to relate it to their own experiences. Then the child starts to ask a lot of questions to understand what caused the disease, or maybe help somehow. Sometimes, he/she assigns the situation to his/her behavior. A child of early school age, despite the fact that he/she is already aware of the principles of functioning of the human body and understands that the disease is not only a kind of cold, but also faulty work of organs, he/she can also blame him/herself for the illness of a loved one, explaining it with his/her behavior. The Author continues that a young people up to 18 years of age are in a difficult, rebellious period of life. Information about the illness and death of a loved one can be received differently. On the one hand, one can get the impression that this young person copes perfectly with the situation. He/she has own duties, which carries out. He/she sets new goals, and works. On the other hand, youngster blames everyone around for everything that happened. This can lead to problems in the school with learning and behavior (Webb 2010).

SUPPORTING MOURNERS IN LOSS

Monroe and Kraus (2007), Oliviere and Monroe (2007) and Krakowiak (2015) write, that in recent years, there has been a particularly noteworthy and recorded increase of publications for people in mourning. Such important changes towards helping these people can be explained by long observations, which recognized mourning as a strong and sometimes even pathogenic situation on both the mental and physical side. The above-mentioned authors and continue that symptoms of

this particular conditions are primarily emotional stress, loss of social functions, increased morbidity and excessive use of health services. In addition, there is growing awareness that the normal process of mourning can last at least a year for most people, and often longer.

Loss and trauma issue in the context of individual support discuss Gear (2014) however earlier, Osterweis et al. (1984) indicated particular support programs which are designed to facilitate the normal process of mourning, and as well as to help people with more serious situations as a high risk of specific related psychological problems or dysfunctional responses to orphanhood. Some of such support programs are directed at people in mourning; others focus on people who share common features of experienced problems. Programs can be designed to help people, families or groups of people in a similar way of mourning. The author continues that mentioned programs are based on institutions such as hospitals, healthcare organizations and mental health centers.

Zhang (2006) suggests that all strategies of help, from consolation through friends to professionally rendered psychotherapy, have the potential for both positive and negative consequences. It seems logical to carry out the research to determine the degree of advancement of the process of mourning and the appropriateness of a particular form of support.

The purpose of such research would be according to Zhang (2006):

- determining the differential impact of interventions on helping those who are mourning during the different phases of the mourning process
- determining the impact of interventions on specific elements of the stress model: the context of the event, personality variables, styles of coping and social support networks
- impact of interventions on people with "high risk", including risk level identification, mitigation actions and concrete results
- the characteristics of different mutual support
- defining the benefits of group support at various stages of the mourning process
- a relationship between self-reported and objectively measured results
- the necessity of using drugs (sedatives, hypnotics and antidepressants) and their

influence on the course of mourning

- the consequences of the various types of interveners in relation to the results
- description of the impact of information about the processes of mourning on the behavior of professionals and behavior, the course of mourning and the results of people in mourning.

Fortunately, apart from not always supportive family and surroundings, and the need to meet a specialist, there are many alternative methods of work. It is possible that this unusual approach to grief will be the key to recovery.

ART SUPPORT

The role of art in broadly meant therapeutic processes discuss Case (1987), Le Count (2000) and Malchiodi (2012). Appleton (2001) and Rogers (2007) analyze supporting the people experiencing trauma. The inseparable elements in the life of every human according to Rogers (2007) is sadness, stories and art. Each of these forms are a way to express own emotions. It often happens that art is the most accurate form of showing what people cannot express in words. Often when one talks about an artistic support model in mourning, one can hear the answers saying that such activities are intended only for children and that the same person has no artistic abilities. This form of support is not just cards and pencils (Rogers 2007). There are also alternative forms that are used in this field.

An inherent task of this type of support is to show the process of changes taking place in the participant's thoughts and actions. Through regular meetings and the creation of a chapter session, one can clearly see the stage of the development of mourning for a given person. These types of support groups are most often opened in hospice dayrooms. They offer the greatest possible involvement on the part of the caregiver, with a very low budget (Scott 2011). Rogers (2007) suggests that the most important thing is to organize the group so that the forms used are safe and adequate to the current needs of the listeners, because despite the common ground of death, not every method of work will be right. Speaking of safety, we mean materials that may be a source of allergic reaction or a risk of injury. Another important element is certainly the number of

volunteers. Certainly, a leader is needed, i.e. a person who proposes a given topic of work. However, in order for every participant to feel appreciated and needed, a listener, a person with a good word or advice is indispensable (Rogers 2007).

MUSIC SUPPORT

The problem of the role of music in the support of people experiencing grief and losses is analyzed by Hilliard (2001), Szulc (2002), Dalton and Krout (2005) and Tung (2014). Szulc (2002) writes that we already know for a long time that music has a positive effect on the pain and anxiety associated with illness and hospitalization (Szulc 2002). The author mentions that there are articles that apart from using music therapy in hospitalization use this method even in dentistry. Losses of friends and loved ones, causes reactions of sadness, regret and mourning. In many people these losses cause depression and cause fear. For some, they cause deeper physical and/or psychological pain. In such cases, a music therapist is a proper person to help. Tung (2014) writes, that music therapists improve the quality of life by focusing on their strengths, abilities and talents, not on deficits and inefficiencies (Tung 2014). By creating the possibility of satisfying creative activity, music therapists make participants feel competent, trustworthy and capable of acting. Music therapy functions according to Szulc (2002) is able to:

- distract attention from pain and anxiety, directing the listener's attention to music that carries comfort,
- provide a musical stimulus for rhythmic breathing,
- offer a rhythmic structure for systematic release from tensions,
- start a positive visual imagination,
- create conditions for deep relaxation,
- change the mood,
- focus on positive thoughts and feelings and on celebrating life.

RELIGIOUS SUPPORT

The experience of sadness and loss is very diverse and certainly depends on the source from which we come from. The issues of a need for spiritual

support while bereavement discuss among other Becvar (1997), Bailey (2002) and Krakowiak (2006; 2015). Kinchin (2001) analyzes relations between death and mourning in the cultural context. Culture according to Kinchin (2001) consists of beliefs, values, traditions and rituals. It is also said that culture is a separate worldview, or a basic set of beliefs that describe how the world works and what is the role of the human being in the world. In societies in which most people adhere to the same religion, beliefs shape the cultural worldview. Beliefs also offer to the people the sense of own existence, give hope for eternal life. The author continues that, religion and culture also affect the mourners' approach to death (Kinchin 2001). For example, some people do not feel the pain of losing someone so badly, if they believe in life after death. Ungureanu (2010) writes, that in some cultures, it is believed that the spirit of the dead directly affects the living, which allows one to enjoy the closeness of the deceased, although he/she is no longer physically present (Ungureanu 2010). The literature says that focusing on getting to know one's own culture, as well as being interested in the diversity of beliefs around the world, may allow mourners to free themselves from the pain of loneliness. Rituals give the opportunity to express their emotions, offer help through the local community or family. Death itself is a kind of chaos for home and loved ones. It causes confusion. Rituals give a sense of certainty, predictability and apparent even normality. They also give tips on what to do, how to function at a given moment of loss (AMTOK 2018).

INTERNET SUPPORT

Mutual support or self-help groups are associations of people who have the same problem, situation or life situation and who unite to help each other (Webb 2010). However, not every person nowadays wants to make such relationships "in the real world". Therefore, the use of the internet is an offer of support for orphans. In addition to the sense of security associated with staying in its own four angles, the user of such a form can also spread his views with other users outside of his country. According to Musambira (2007) online support groups provide their members with:

- personal change based on identification and reciprocity

- access to a set of specialized information
- the ability to share coping techniques based on mourning
- a chance to educate not only other people with similar problems, but also professionals and the public
- the ability to help others by providing specific help and creating a model to follow.

EDUCATION OF SCIENCE SUPPORT

Science can be also involved in educational support, especially for children and youths mourning, is the use of science. Physics, chemistry and other scientific disciplines, through experiments and observations, support the process of passing mourning among young mourners. These classes, through the lack of direct intervention by a specialist - psychologist and a wide range of classes, allow the mourner to open up conversations and to build the confidences with the guardian. The method of psycho-education allows the young mourner to enjoy scientific work on the project, thanks to which he/she ceases to think about temporal problems and becomes willing to cooperate, or even compete with the peers. Scientific riddles also allow to bring the young mourners closer to his/her guardians, which can strengthen the relationships of all participants: between the child-caregiver and caregiver-guardian. In addition, this form allows curiosity for the student to learn and develop the imagination. It also prevents educational problems at school. This report has its application in Poland. The Hospice Foundation in Gdansk conducts experimental science classes with orphaned children, young mourners supported by the Orphaned Children's Fund. The science classes are organized once a month with various representatives of science – the scholars. Together with them young mourners learn about the fascinating world of scientific experiments. These meetings take place both at the Volunteer Center, as well as at the lecture rooms of universities, in laboratories and museums. In this way young mourners learn about the existence of such places and opportunities for fun in the world of science (Łęgowska 2017).

CONCLUSION

There is no single proven way of supporting a child or adolescent in such a difficult period of time as

mourning. Usually, there is no need for specialist intervention in the process of dealing with loss. A natural area of help is support from the closest environment, family and in the case of children of the school environment. Support can be provided in various forms mentioned above, even emotional support. Essential is to create an atmosphere of understanding, security and trust. Sometimes, however, the immediate surroundings are not enough. One should then ask someone outside for help. The most common methodology for working with a mourner is a meeting with a specialist psychologist and in the case of children with trained pedagogues. However, as it turns out, not only regular conversations with a psychologist can free a person from the pain of loneliness. There are many alternative methods of fighting with oneself and own fears. Mourner can take artistic or music classes, get interested in a new culture, travel and deepen own beliefs about the world, and broaden own curiosity about the world through education of science creativity.

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