



### Sub-module 7.1 - Grief Coaching for Children and Adolescents

Grieving in children and adolescents is a particular experience, different from that of adults due to their developmental cognitive and emotional stage. Bereaved young people often have a limited understanding of death and its finality, and they may express their grief indirectly or in ways that diverge from adult expectations. As a GRIEF COACH, it is essential to understand these specifics to offer suitable and compassionate support to grieving children and adolescents.

In children, understanding of death evolves based on their age and cognitive development level. Toddlers do not yet have the ability to grasp the irreversible nature of death, and may believe the deceased person will return. Preschool-aged children begin to understand the finality of death but may still harbor magical thinking or believe their behaviors caused the death. It is not until about 6-7 years of age that children gain a more mature understanding of death as a universal and irreversible event.

Given these peculiarities, it is essential to adapt language and tools to support grieving children. It is recommended to use simple and concrete words when talking about death, avoiding euphemisms that may cause confusion (such as "gone" or "asleep"). It is also important to reassure children that they are not responsible for the death and to encourage them to ask questions to clarify their understanding. Creative tools such as drawing, playing, or storytelling can be particularly helpful for children to express their emotions and make sense of their loss.

For adolescents, grieving can be complicated by developmental factors unique to this period, such as the quest for identity, the need for autonomy, and the importance of peer

relationships. Bereaved adolescents may tend to mask their grief to not feel different from their friends or adopt risky behaviors to handle their intense emotions. They may also feel torn between the need for parental support and the desire to assert themselves as independent individuals.

To accompany grieving adolescents, it is crucial to create a safe, non-judgmental space where they can freely express their emotions and thoughts. It is important to validate their grief and normalize their reactions while helping them find healthy coping strategies. Narrative tools, such as writing or creating videos, can be particularly relevant to help them articulate their experiences and honor the memory of the deceased. It is also crucial to encourage them to maintain connections with their peers and continue their activities and projects while respecting their need for moments of solitude or commemoration.

In the support of grieving children and adolescents, collaboration with parents and other significant adults (teachers, educators) is critical. It is important to support adults in their own grieving process so that they can offer a stable and reassuring presence to the young. It is also helpful to advise them on how to talk about death with children, answer their questions, and include them in rituals and commemorations. By creating a therapeutic alliance with adults, the GRIEF COACH can help weave a coherent and compassionate support network around the bereaved young people.

Ultimately, it is critical to remain attentive to signs of complicated grief in children and adolescents, such as prolonged social withdrawal, persistent academic difficulties, or overwhelming depressive or anxious symptoms. In these situations, it may be necessary to refer the young people and their families to specialized resources, such as psychological follow-up or support groups. The role of the GRIEF COACH is then to facilitate this referral and collaborate with other involved professionals, in an integrated approach focused on the child or adolescent's needs.

By accompanying grieving children and adolescents with sensitivity, creativity, and respect for their uniqueness, the GRIEF COACH can contribute to fostering their resilience and growth in the face of loss. By helping them express their emotions, make sense of their experiences, and maintain a connection with the deceased, foundations are laid for a hopeful and healing journey. Their role is to offer a compassionate and reassuring presence, allowing the young to feel heard, validated, and supported in this life challenge.

Key takeaways:

1. Grieving in children and adolescents differs from adults due to their developmental cognitive and emotional stage.
2. The understanding of death in children evolves based on their age and level of cognitive development.

3. It is crucial to adapt language and tools to support grieving children, using simple, concrete words, and avoiding euphemisms.
4. Creative tools, such as drawing, playing, or storytelling, can help children express their emotions and make sense of their loss.
5. In adolescents, grief can be complicated by developmental issues unique to this period, such as the quest for identity, the need for autonomy, and the importance of peer relationships.
6. To accompany grieving adolescents, it is essential to create a safe, non-judgmental space, and encourage them to maintain connections with peers and continue their activities.
7. Collaboration with parents and other significant adults is critical in supporting grieving children and adolescents.
8. It is crucial to stay attentive to signs of complicated grief in children and adolescents and refer to specialized resources if necessary.
9. By accompanying grieving children and adolescents with sensitivity, creativity, and respect for their uniqueness, the GRIEF COACH can contribute to fostering their resilience and growth in the face of loss.