Childhood Traumatic Grief Treatment

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Objectives

Participants will:

• Define childhood traumatic grief and related symptoms
• Identify adaptations to PRACTICE components for cases of traumatic grief
• Describe the four grief-focused components of childhood traumatic grief treatment
• Identify resources for children and families experiencing traumatic grief
Childhood Traumatic Grief

• When someone close to the child dies in a way that is experienced as traumatic by the child, often in a sudden or violent manner

• Child may experience unresolved/complicated grief, depressive symptoms, and PTSD symptoms

• Child cannot go through the normal bereavement process because trauma symptoms interfere
Uncomplicated Grief Reactions

- Sad mood and/or irritability
- Sleep problems
- Loss of appetite
- Decreased interest in family and friends
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches)
- Regressive behaviors
- Trouble concentrating
- Preoccupation with death
Traumatic Grief Reactions

- Intrusive memories of the death
  - Nightmares
  - Guilt or self-blame about how the person died
  - Recurrent or disturbing thoughts about how the person died

- Avoidance and numbing
  - Withdrawal
  - Acting as if not upset
  - Avoiding reminders of the person, the way he or she died, or the things that led to the death

- Physical or emotional symptoms of increased arousal
  - Irritability and/or anger
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Decreased concentration
  - Stomachaches or headaches
  - Hypervigilance
  - Fears about safety for oneself or others
Overview of Traumatic Grief Treatment

• Do PRACTICE components to address trauma symptoms first

• Once trauma symptoms are resolved, child will be ready to focus on grief components

• Grief is a process and may not be completed in a short-term treatment approach
Psychoeducation and Parenting Skills in CTG

- Psychoeducation
  - Statistics/facts about cause of death
  - Address issues of intentionality
- Parenting Skills
  - How has caretaking changed since the death?
  - Explore caregiver stress and supports
Relaxation and Affect Regulation in CTG

- Pleasant activities/safe places may be trauma/loss reminders
- Thinking of the deceased may trigger memories of how s/he died
- Use neutral scene/memory for thought replacement
- Create safety/coping plans
Ready to Remember: Jeremy’s Journey of Hope and Healing

Trauma Narrative in CTG

- Intro may not include family life before trauma if that’s too painful
- Context of the death – the day when it happened or child found out
- Gradually include facts of what happened, including sensory details and worst moments
- Fantasy vs. reality
- How the child has changed since the person died
Cognitive Processing in CTG

- Rescue/revenge fantasies
- Responsibility for the death
- Factors which may make it hard for kids to understand that the person is really dead
- “What would the person have wanted to tell you?”
- “What can you think and do now to feel better?”
Conjoint Child-Caregiver Sessions

• Caregiver may be grieving at different pace
• Helpful to share TN – caregiver can reinforce accurate and helpful cognitions
Grief-Focused Components

• Grief Psychoeducation
  • General info about grief and death
    o How, when, and why people die
    o What happens to the body
    o Focus on child and family’s beliefs (role of culture, religion, rituals, myths)
    o Help caretgiver talk directly with child about death
    o Address and normalize feelings associated with death
    o Stressors and changes as result of death

• Resources: Sesame Street: When Families Grieve, NCTSN Video: It’s OK to Remember
Grief Psychoeducation (continued)

- Developmental considerations
  - Handouts for parents about kids’ understanding of death at different ages
- Grieving process
  - Education – no timeline or set order
- Secondary adversities
- Feelings of safety
  - Need for a lot of reassurance
Grieving and Ambivalent Feelings

- Explore what is missed
- Look toward the future
- Resolve ambivalent feelings
- Normalize the child’s and caregiver’s feelings
- Healing letter or conversation with person’s soul/spirit
- Help child work through guilt about his/her feelings and any related distortions
- Deal with negative aspects of the relationship
Preserving Positive Memories

• Resolution of traumatic aspects allows child to access positive memories

• Goal: help child find comfort, reexperience joy, and give self permission to feel happy again

• Creating a positive memory keepsake

• Involving others – collect memories, reconnect with social network

• Continuing with memories – sharing with family

• Holding a memorial service (incorporate cultural/religious rituals)
Redefining the Relationship

- Recommitting to new relationships
- Redefining relationships – what is in past vs. what is still available
- Connecting with others
- Finding and letting others into your life
- Personalizing and integrating relationships
Treatment Review and Closure

- Assessing progress
- Conduct closing joint session – share memory keepsake or hold memorial service or ritual
- Preparing for future: predict, plan, and permit
- Termination
“I’ll Be There”
Resources

- [http://ctg.musc.edu/](http://ctg.musc.edu/)

- **NCTSN:**
  - The Courage to Remember/Vale la Pena Recordar
  - Information on CTG for parents/caregivers, school personnel, media, and pediatricians
  - Sibling death

- **Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families:** [http://www.dougy.org/](http://www.dougy.org/)

- [http://www.griefnet.org/](http://www.griefnet.org/)

- The Invisible String – Patrice Karst
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