ATTACHMENT LOSS AND GRIEF

Generalized Reactions to Grief
- Negative behavior: May become angry and strike out at adults and friends. May have difficulty expressing their feelings when someone close to them dies. Emotions may come out sideways as behavioral difficulties.
- Increased activity: May become restless and overactive in response to grief. This helps them deny feelings for periods of time.
- Dependency: May become clingy and over-dependent on adults to cope with their sadness and grief.
- Regression: May return to behaviors previously given up.

How Preschoolers Express Grief
- Bedwetting and thumb sucking
- Difficulty toileting and/or sleeping
- Anxiety at bedtime
- Clinging to adults – general clinginess
- Exaggerated fears, especially of abandonment
- Crying and excessive crying
- Irritability and temper tantrums
- Regression
- Stubbornness

How Elementary Children Express Grief
- Overt signs of grief: sadness and anger
- School and learning problems
- Social problems
- Preoccupation with the loss
- Preoccupation with related worries
- Daydreaming and inattention
- Bedwetting and other Regression
- Developmental delays
- Eating and sleeping problems
- Fighting and Violent play
- Anger at adults and friends

How Pre-Teens and Early Adolescents Express Grief
- Physical symptoms and complaints
- Wide mood swings
- Able to verbally expresses emotions
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Increase risk-taking & self-destructive behaviors
- Anger, aggression and fighting
- Oppositional behavior
- Withdrawal from adults
- Depression and sadness
- Lack of concentration and attention
- Identity confusion
- Testing limits

**Affective Symptoms**
- Sad, depressed
- Scared, frightened, fearful, panic
- Confused, disorganized, relief
- Rage, anger, irritability, frustration
- Flattened, numb, avoidant, disbelief
- Guilt, self-blame, responsibility
- Abandonment, loneliness
- Hopeless, worthless, helpless

**Behavioral Symptoms**
- Regression and developmental delays
- Tantrums, rages, aggression, fighting
- Withdrawal and avoidance (of adults)
- Unpredictable and limit-testing
- Self-abusive, risk-taking, and destructive behaviors
- Lower functioning at school and home
- Slowed or agitated speech and/or body movement

**Cognitive Symptoms**
- False assumptions about cause of event
- Self-blame and self-hatred
- Believe they are responsible for death
- Believe they are being punished
- Destructive ideation
- Magical thinking
- Imagining death scenarios
- Lack of concentration and attention

**Physiological Symptoms**
- Nausea, stomach aches, headaches
- Change in appetite
- Sleeplessness, fatigue, exhaustion
- Hypervigilance, restlessness
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in throat or chest, palpitations
- Crying and sighing
- Weakness, light-headed, dizzy
Social Symptoms
- Overly sensitive
- Dependent
- Withdrawn, avoiding others
- Lack of initiative or interest
- Hyperactive or underactive
- Relationship difficulties
- Lowered self esteem
- Avoiding talking about loss so others won't feel uncomfortable

Spiritual Symptoms
- Shaken belief in beneficence
- Belief of being punished
- Undermined basic trust
- Fear of religious ceremonies
- Confusion, fear about death and dying
- Preoccupation with death
- Spiritual developmental injury
- Sensing a presence (visual/auditory)

Factors That Affect Functioning
- Coping strategies
- Previous functioning
- Defense mechanisms
- Resiliency features
- Protective factors
- Risk Factors

Risk Factors
(Increased number of risk factors = increased difficulty in child grief process)
- Sudden death, suicide, homicide or termination of parental rights
- Death or termination of parental rights of mother for girls before/during adolescence
- Death or termination of parental rights of father for pre-teen/adolescent boys
- Stigma associated with suicide/homicide or termination of parental rights
- Conflictual relationship prior to death or loss of parent/s
- Inadequate preparation for funeral or removal or termination of parental rights
- Pre-existing psychological difficulties for child and/or parents
- Lack of reality testing
- Psychologically vulnerable caregiver
- Lack of family and community support
- Unstable environment
- Poor family coping (poor communication)
- Immediate dating by surviving parent
• Remarriage of surviving parent if child’s relationship with stepparent is negative

**Protective Factors**
Protective factors foster the ability to cope and thrive in difficult circumstances.

• Individual attributes:
  o Intelligence
  o Communication skills
  o Internal locus of control
  o Positive self-concept

• Emotional ties/cohesion within the family
• Strong social support from families, teachers, church, and community
• Parental coping and support for the child
• Economic resources to facilitate the family's adaptation
• Prior low levels of anxiety and depression
• Positive, adaptive coping and problem-solving skills
• Prior successful academic achievement
• Ability to understand the events based on age and developmental level

**Depression symptoms:**
• Loss of pleasure/interest in life
• Irritability, anger and/or deep sadness
• Isolation and withdrawal
• Hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness
• Sleeping/fatigue and/or eating problems and/or hoarding
• Psychomotor agitation or retardation
• Difficulty concentrating
• Recurrent thoughts of death and/or suicide

**Anxiety symptoms:**
• Excessive anxiety and worry; cannot control the worry
• Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
• Being easily fatigued
• Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
• Irritability
• Muscle tension
• Sleep disturbance including nightmares
• Obsessions/compulsions
• Phobias
• Hypervigilence and autonomic symptoms

*Prepared by MSU School of Social Work Faculty.*