Addressing Issues of Grief and Loss

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OBJECTIVES

• Learn what it means to have a meaningful relationship
• Learn about a child’s sense of self and belonging
• Learn what trauma, grief and loss and how these symptoms may expose themselves through behavior
• Learn how to advocate for the children to ensure that they are receiving the proper services

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.
~ Jane Howard
Trauma
An intense event that threatens or causes harm to a child’s emotional and physical well-being (National Child Traumatic Stress Network).

- Accident
- Attack
- Abuse – physical
- Domestic violence
- Bullying
- Natural Disaster

- Abuse – verbal
- Witnessing trauma
- Can happen in just one experience or multiple experiences.
- Can affect people differently.

Symptoms
- lack of concentration
- sleep disorders
- impulsivity
- hyper-arousal
- delayed development
- difficulty regulating emotions
- withdrawal
- anxiety
- anger
- aggression
- self absorbed behavior
- depression and physical complaints
Other symptoms

Other symptoms you don’t notice, for example, feeling at fault, thinking a lot about the memory, and being afraid that something like it will happen again.

• It can change how children view the world and their futures.

• It can also take a tremendous toll on the entire family.

• After a trauma or loss, children often feel very insecure, and might test caregivers by trying to get special treatment or by acting up.

• Many children keep their distress to themselves, so as not to worry their parents or seem strange to their friends.
How do you know if this is normal behavior or not for a child?

• Communicating with the parent(s) to find out how their child typically handles a situation or reacts. You can also ask family members and other key members in a child’s life, such as previous teachers.
• Having a child assessed by a therapist (if age appropriate).
• Observing the child in different situations.
• Knowing child development stages.

Grief and loss

Deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement (Merriam-Webster).

Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance

• Child may not go through the grief stages in order.
• The child may go through stages more than one time.
• Grief is personal...meaning people grief at their own pace.

Stages
## Stages

- **Denial**
  - “My Family will be here soon to pick me up.”
  - “The police lied about my dad. He wouldn’t do any of the things they said he did.”

- **Anger**
  - “I hate social workers. They don’t understand anything about my family.”
  - “I hate my mom, why would she let this happen to me?”

- **Bargaining**
  - “If I am good, can I go home?”
  - “If I tell them that it didn’t happen can I come home?”

- **Depression**
  - “I am all alone.”
  - “What is going to happen with me?”

- **Acceptance**
  - “I am not with my mom, but I am safe.”
  - “This is not my fault.”
  - “I will be okay.”

## How Can You Help

- Be supportive and reassuring
- Listen
- Tell them over and over again, that he or she is not to blame, is safe now, etc.
- No speed dating
- Ensure consistency
- The right services are in place
- Educate others
- Be aware of triggers
• Ensure that the right services are being provided to children in a timely manner
• Know community resources that you can refer the child/family (i.e., grief counseling)
• Support efforts for community education programs, to highlight loss and grief issues and to increase understanding and awareness of the need for support services
• Ensure that the child is involved in activities like dance, sports, or clubs
• Help the child work on his/her life books

• Listen to the child when he/she decide to talk about their birth families. Assign feelings when appropriate such as, "Sounds like you are disappointed." or "You must miss your mom." and "I bet you were scared."
• Give the child a journal. Help him/her get started with these questions.
• Support the child before and after family visitation. Prepare yourself and know that the child may act out. Start a tradition of doing something after visitation if possible. Go get ice cream, go for a walk, or take a drive. This gives the child time to talk about the visit and relax.
• Finally, take care of yourself.

Ensure that caregivers provide:

• Consistent daily routine for the child
• Reassuring by listening, teaching, nurturing, comforting them, and allowing the child to feel some sense of control by providing them with choices that they can make.

Caregivers need to be organized, calm, and confident in themselves.
Untreated

• Untreated, the child’s response to trauma or loss can have long-term consequences.
• This can range from being more sensitive to similar wounds in the future, all the way to major problems such as:
  – long-term behavior problems,
  – depression,
  – anxiety,
  – or post-traumatic stress disorder.

System Challenges

• Slow
• Team work may be lacking or systems don’t talk to one another
• Inferior position - lack of power and control
• Everyone has their thoughts and ideas about how to parent or which relationships are to remain in tact and which ones won’t
• Stress from meeting all of the requirements
Child and family challenges

• Trauma, grief and loss
• Multiple parenting influences, values and beliefs
• Preconceived thoughts and ideas that influence actions
• Difficulty forming meaningful and trusting relationships
• Lack of power and control
• Lack of identity
• Developmentally delayed
• Mental illness
• Physical limitations or challenges
• Lack of family support or family disruption

Traits that families and systems must have in order to form meaningful relationships

• Flexibility
• Supportive and educated family
• Patience
• Accepting
• Knowledge of themselves
• Strong knowledge of developmental stages
• Inclusive attitude
• Strong advocacy skills
• Ability to be part of a team

Mistakes that are made by both the system and families

• Forgetting the basics and attributing everything that a child does or says as a foster care or an adoption issue
• Allowing others to do the advocating
• Becoming overwhelmed and not asking for help
• Pushing the “system” out too soon
• Having the “love will solve all” mentality
• Forgetting to be normal
• Speed dating
• Having pre-conceived ideas that influence your behavior and attitude
• Being “mental health focused” and “maintaining the labels”
• Forgetting or ignoring history
Recommendations for building meaningful relationships with a child

- Drop the labels
- Normalcy
- Address the grief, loss, and trauma
- Help the child develop a sense of self
- Don’t put pressure on them to “move on”
- Listen to them - that is empowering
- Model positive relationships - teach them what it means

Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter.

~ Brad Henry

Products for Sale

**FLUX: Life After Foster Care**

brings honest, useful, and juicy real-life expertise that can only come from those of us who have experienced the system first hand.

We explore bio family relationships, building support systems, parenting, and intimacy topics.
Postcards From The Soul

When you open Postcards From The Soul, you’ll see into the depths of the often-hidden emotions of people who have shared extraordinary experiences.

This collection of postcards is both moving and illuminating. The emotions are raw and genuine. Every postcard tells a piece of the life story of a real person. Maybe even somebody you know.

Flux: Training

If you talk to most alumni, they will say that they were ill-prepared to anticipate and strategize for the precarious phase between being a dependent foster youth and a healthy, independent adult.

Recognizing this gap, FCAA created the Flux: Life After Foster Care Training Program.