

School Counseling Grief Using a Dual Process Model

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Intro

Grief is a complex emotional response to loss that affects individuals across all stages of life, including children and adolescents. Grief counseling in a school setting ensures that students receive support in a safe, structured environment with tools to navigate their feelings of loss. Grief counseling fits into broader theoretical frameworks of psychology and counseling, particularly those that focus on emotional regulation, attachment, and resilience. In doing research on grief counseling, I was particularly drawn to discussions of constructivist theories like the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement. The notion that grief is not a linear process but instead involves oscillating between confronting and avoiding the emotional pain of loss fascinated me, and I felt that in a school setting, it is a very difficult issue for counselors to tackle but is very much needed by the students.

Relevance to Counseling

Some students will need to navigate the emotional impact of grief and the demands of their academic and social worlds. In the school setting, grief counseling is relevant because it addresses the needs of grieving students whose emotional well-beings may become critically affected by loss and is an appropriate intervention to help them cope effectively. Many schools focus on academic success and behavioral management, but emotional and psychological challenges like grief are often unrecognized. Feigelman (2017) found that children who deal with parental bereavement are more likely to experience various psychosocial problems such as increased risk of depression, suicidality, lower academic performance, substance abuse, and delinquent behavior during adolescence. Furthermore, addressing grief can be a very difficult topic for school counselors to tackle due to its emotional sensitivity and complexity (Wood et al, 2023). Implementing this model directly addresses these gaps by providing a framework for

school counselors to offer tailored support that meets the developmental and emotional needs of grieving students.

Describing the EBP

The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (DPM) offers insight to how students respond to the emotional toll that grows during grief. The gist of the DPM is that grieving individuals oscillate between the loss-oriented (LO) response and the restoration-oriented (RO) response. LO involves direct engagement with the feelings of grief, which may include sadness, anger, confusion, etc. It focuses on processing the grief itself, coming to terms with the absence of the loved one, and expressing the emotional weight of that loss. In a counseling session this can look like asking questions such as “how have you been feeling since the loss? What do you miss most about the person who passed away? What memories with them do you find yourself thinking about a lot?” RO focuses on the practical aspect of moving forward with life despite the loss. This is critical for students to re-engage with academic, social, and extracurricular responsibilities. RO counseling questioning examples could be “are there things in your routine or at school that feel harder now? What kind of things help take your mind off the grief? How are you managing your schoolwork/other responsibilities right now?” The benefits of the DPM in school counseling are its emotional validation and flexibility. It also teaches resilience and coping skills through its alternation/oscillation between emotional processing and restoration tasks.

Evidence of Support

Fiore (2021) identified 474 articles between 1999 – 2016 related to the DPM and found that the DPM model may be more effective than traditional grief therapy. Her examination used many designs that were qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal, mixed-methods, and cross-

sectional. Difficulties arose regarding defining what bereavement looked like and the oscillation process, but overall, it proved to be a valuable framework for understanding the dynamic nature of grief, allowing for flexibility in how individuals cope with loss and providing a practical approach to tailoring interventions based on individual needs. In addition, research has shown that DPM has a practical application in social work. According to Nguyen et al. (2022), by using the DPM, social workers better understand and assess grieving processes of individuals in diverse contexts with dynamic coping strategies, cultural + gender sensitivity regarding grief, and intervention identification.

Discussion

This model seems like a solid fit for my style of counseling. I've lost my two grandfathers and my dad, so I'm familiar with grief at a young age. Trying to manage my grieving emotions while also trying to manage my life in other ways is a feeling I know all too well. I hope that as a counselor, I'd never have to see a student of mine deal with grief at a young age; but if it does happen, I'd like to keep my knowledge of grief counseling in mind to help others cope with the horrible feeling of loss. My role as a counselor will be to be present to address the needs of students. I want to improve at teaching coping strategies, and the Dual Process Model seems like a good way of teaching acceptance, emotional regulation, resilience, and flexibility in grieving.

Should I pursue this model further, I believe I will deal with relationship issues such as personal attachment, isolation, and support struggles. Grief counseling inherently involves the student's attachment to the person they've lost, and the disruption of this attachment can lead to negative feelings which manifest in their relationships with others. Students may isolate themselves or strain relationships with those close to them, which can lead to already complex

emotions becoming even more complex than before. Students may also struggle with seeking support, and this model highlights the importance of restoration-oriented tasks, which can help rebuild support networks.

I plan to address issues of cultural diversity by keeping an open dialogue for students to share their cultural, religious, or spiritual beliefs about grief. Different cultures have varying mourning practices, beliefs about death, and expectations about how grief should be expressed. I would respect rituals and traditions. I would inquire about and respect each student's cultural norms and integrate them into the grief counseling process. In my office, it would be a supportive, non-judgmental environment that encourages reflection and incorporates aspects of beliefs into counseling that makes the process more meaningful and supportive.

References:

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