Bereavement in Children and Adolescents

Abstract:

Grief is described as the normal process of reacting to a loss, which can be experienced physically (e.g., the death of a loved one), socially (e.g., through divorce), occupationally (e.g., losing a job), or materially (e.g., a change in financial status). Em otional reactions can include anger, anguish, anxiety, despair, guilt, and sadness; in fact, there is no em otion (or lack of em otion) that cannot be considered part of 'normal' grief. Physical reactions can include changes in appetite, illness, physical problems, or sleeping problem s. Children's experience of grief varies depending on the type of loss and the developm ental stage of the child. Moving to a new town may precipitate a grief response that is mild and transient, while grief from loss of a parent threatens the foundation of the child's world. Young children express grief in vastly different ways from teens and adults. A child's grief is complicated because it is linear, circular, and developm ental. Grieving children describe grief sym ptom s similar to those of adults, with the expression of their grief being influenced by their age, verbal and cognitive abilities, and their understanding of death. Cognitive–behavioural interventions with bereaved children and their parents have been shown to effect significant im provem ents in depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms and reduction in sym ptom s of com plicated grief, reducing children's sym ptom s of trauma has been shown to reduce also their grief-related distress, though additional bereavem ent-focused work can be useful when distress continues.

Keywords: *death, bereavem ent, children, grief.*