


COPING WITH GRIEF IN FOSTER CARE

Tabatha
Perhealth, MS,
LMHC, NCC,
ADHD-CCSP,
CATP

Foster Care 101: Grief and Loss for Foster Parents part 1

By Dr. John DeGarmo





Grief is an emotion that overcomes us when there is a sudden loss of a loved one in the family.

Different people react differently to the loss or death of a loved one and grieve in a different manner.

Grief is felt not only with the death of someone close or dear to us; we grieve whenever we feel a loss, when something dear to us is taken away from us.

Grief is considered normal and healthy response to a major loss in life.

What is Grief?

What is Bereavement

Bereavement is the state of being in grief and often described as the period after a loss during which a person feels grief.

Bereavement requires acceptance of the fact that your loss is real, and the person who has passed will not come back.

Can fall in to DSM-5 mental health disorders- depression, anxiety and Persistent complex bereavement disorder

Five Stages of Grief by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Denial: "This cannot be happening to me!"

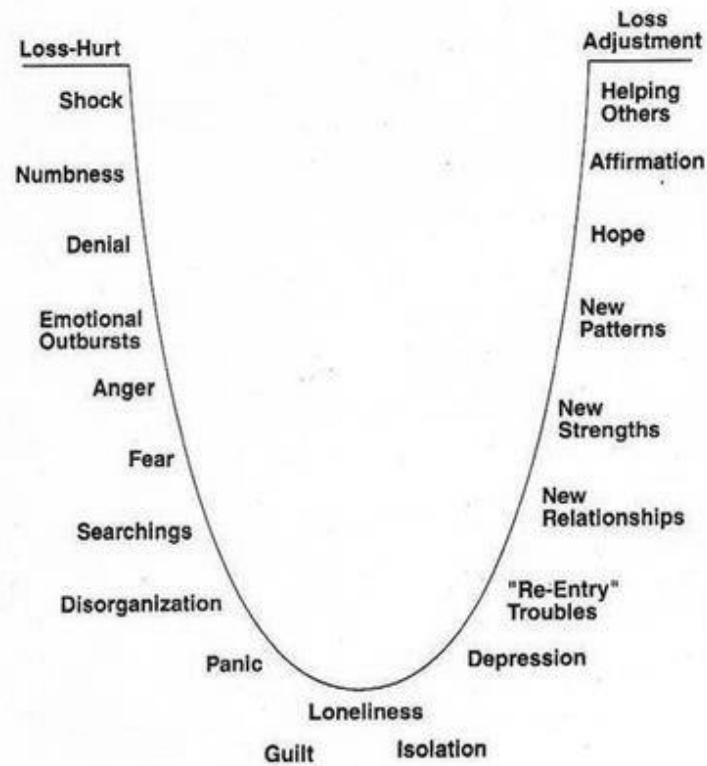
Anger: "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"

Bargaining: "Make this not happen and in return, I will_____"

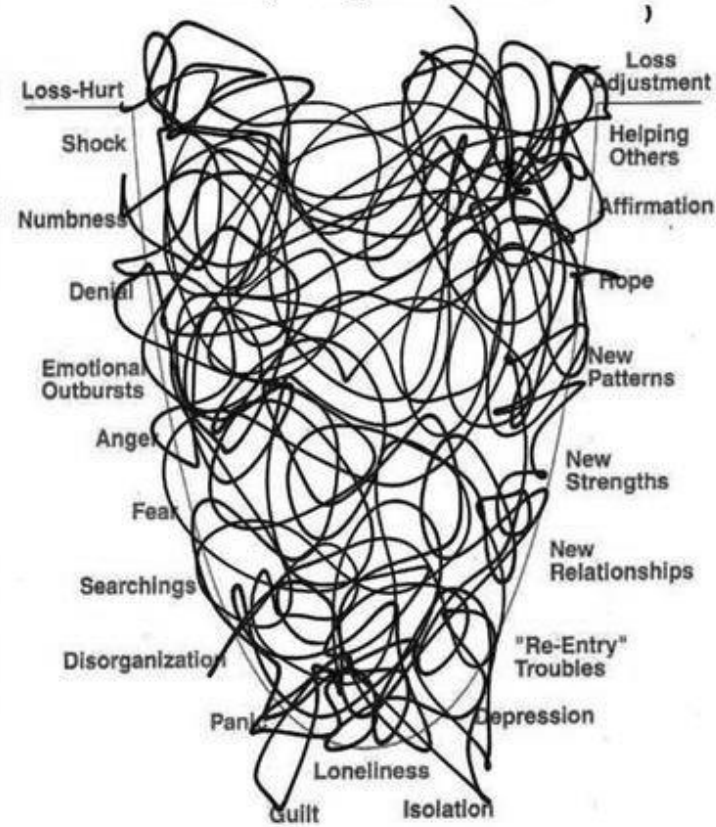
Depression: "I am too sad to do anything."

Acceptance: "I am at peace with what happened."

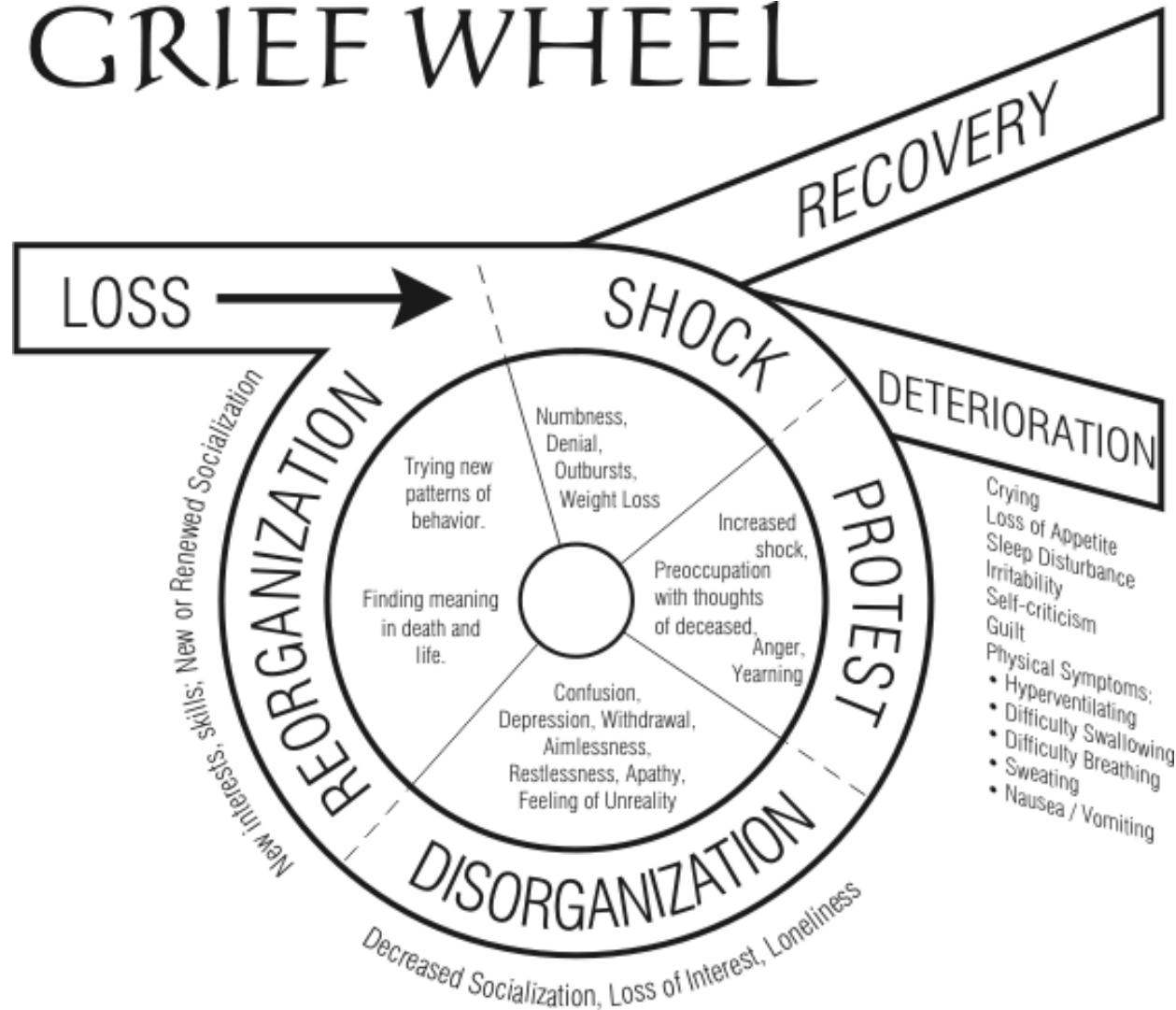
STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience



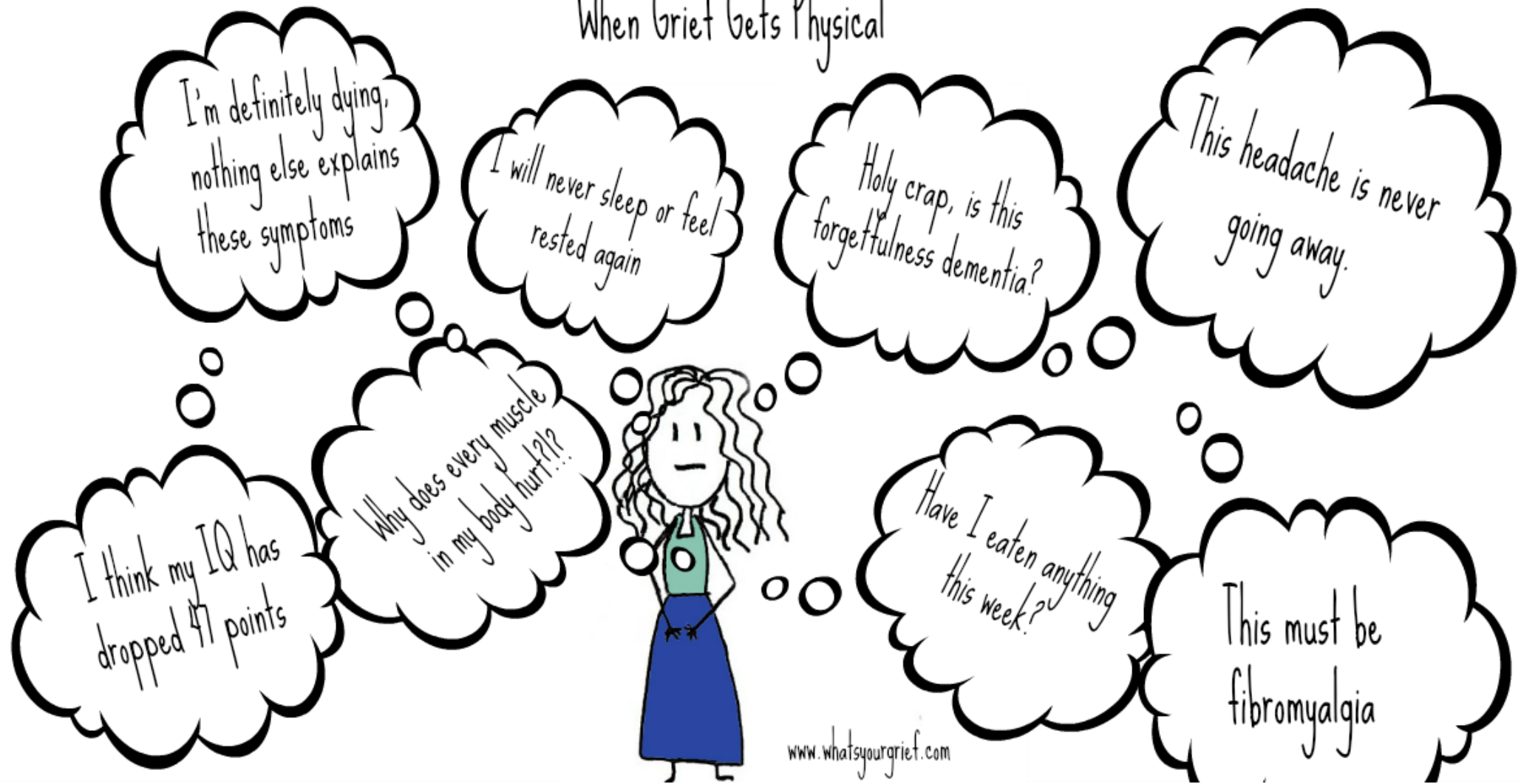
GRIEF WHEEL



Common Symptoms of Grief

- ❖ **Shock and disbelief**—Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb and have trouble believing that the loss really happened, even deny the truth.
- ❖ **Sadness**—Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptoms of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- ❖ **Guilt**—You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or did not say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings. Sometimes, children will blame themselves for causing the loss, even though they did nothing wrong.
- ❖ **Anger**—Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- ❖ **Fear**—A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless or insecure. You may even have panic attacks.
- ❖ **Physical symptoms**— We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, stomachaches, headaches, and muscle tension

When Grief Gets Physical



Foster Care 101: Grief and Loss for Foster Parents part 2



Some of the more common experiences listed below:

- difficulty concentrating
- numbness
- irritability
- weepiness
- loss of appetite
- anxiety
- powerlessness
- pain
- sleep disturbance
- guilt
- anger
- loneliness
- apathy
- depression
- tense
- Code 258

**No two
people grieve
in the same
way**



Foster Parent Grief

Loss and grief are an integral part of the experience of foster care parenting and impact everyone involved in this system.

It is important to acknowledge, express and manage these powerful emotions in a healthy way and is important for their well-being as well as for the children in their care.

Children learn from adults how to grieve, how to acknowledge their losses and how to honor their feelings. Foster parents are often the first teachers of healthy expression of emotions for abused and neglected children.

To support the grieving children in their care, they must receive understanding and support for their grief.

Grief and Loss Coping Strategies for Foster Parents

- ❖ Prepare to let go from the beginning: fostering is not a guarantee of a forever placement from the start.
- ❖ Life books are great tools, not only for children, but also for families. Create a life book reflecting your journey as a foster parent
- ❖ Plant a tree or garden. While you watch it grow, you'll know she's growing up, too. Something possible because you stepped in when she needed you most.
- ❖ Be Patient with yourself
- ❖ Talk about the loss



**KEEP
CALM
AND
PRACTICE
SELF-CARE**

Self-care is important

- ❖ Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief but you cannot avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain.
- ❖ Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal or write a letter to the one who is gone...even if you can't mail it.
- ❖ Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you also can feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right and exercising.
- ❖ Develop a ritual for grieving without judgement
- ❖ Don't rush in to a new placement

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

WAYS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF WHILE GRIEVING

During the grieving process, it is important to remember that everyone experiences grief differently. One way to help you during this process is to be compassionate towards yourself. Please see these ideas as suggestions only. Do what feels right to you.



1

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

Many times we think that grief should be something we get over or move through quickly. Give yourself permission to really feel your loss. Do whatever it is that feels comforting to you, regardless what others may think. If your life is busy, set aside at least a few minutes each day to really feel your loss.

2

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

Treat yourself as you would treat a good friend going through the same loss. Be kind to yourself and put any self-criticism and judgments aside. You are doing the best you can.

3

AVOID HARSH ENVIRONMENTS

Now is not the time to watch TV news, horror movies or be in loud crowds. Surround yourself with your favorite books and soothing music.

4

EAT WELL & MOVE YOUR BODY

Don't numb yourself with junk food. If you don't have much of an appetite, eat healthy foods in small portions. Moving your body will also help you to clear your head and be in the present moment.

5

FIND FELLOW GRIEVERS

It may be tempting to isolate yourself from others, but tremendous healing can take place in a group of fellow grievers. Check your local churches, hospitals or even social networks to find a group where you are comfortable.

6

WRITE A LETTER

Writing can be a wonderful way to process your thoughts and emotions. Try writing a letter to your present self from your future self several years from now offering consolation and hope for the future. You can also try writing a letter to your loved one and let your emotions flow.

7

SPEND TIME IN NATURE

Spending time outside and around animals can be so grounding and can bring you fully into the present moment. Take everything in and open up your senses to the entire experience.

8

REVISIT AN OLD HOBBY OR TRY A NEW ONE

Did you play an instrument in the band? Did you always want to learn how to paint? Now may be a great time to indulge yourself a little and encourage your inner creative to come out to play.

The 5 Most Important Self-Love Practices for Parents

1. Keep your own cup filled. Take Action!
2. Have hobbies.
3. Get away without the kids.
4. Have goals outside of family life.
5. Fulfill your souls calling or your life purpose.



You know you are recovering when...

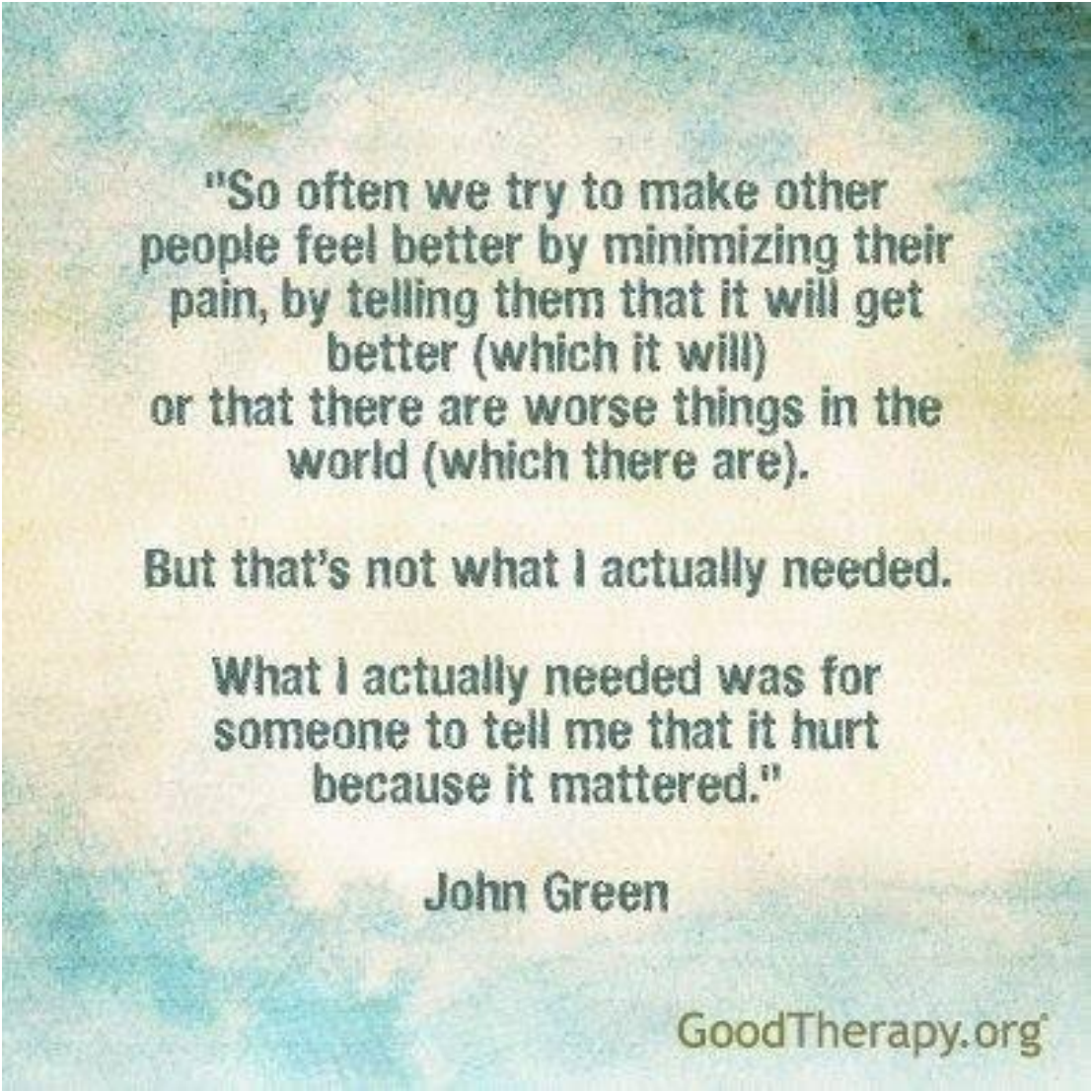


- ❖ You can laugh and enjoy being with others
- ❖ Taking care of yourself is not only O.K., but it feels good
- ❖ The future is not so frightening
- ❖ You can handle special days without falling apart
- ❖ You want to reach out to others in need or pain
- ❖ You now enjoy activities that you had given up
- ❖ You can share humorous memories without crying
- ❖ Your emotional roller coaster is slowing down
- ❖ You can actually see the progress you've made



How to Support Others Who are Grieving





"So often we try to make other people feel better by minimizing their pain, by telling them that it will get better (which it will) or that there are worse things in the world (which there are).

But that's not what I actually needed.

What I actually needed was for someone to tell me that it hurt because it mattered."

John Green

GoodTherapy.org



How to help the children with Grief and loss

The adults are not only grief but the children entering or leaving foster care are too as well as the foster parent's children. As adults, children look up to us as role models.

- **Use a trauma focus.** Separation from one's birth parent or parents is traumatic.
- **Allow time for children to adjust.** The child in your care can't bond to you while still grieving separation from a birthparent.
- **Provide stability.** Moving from placement to placement will disrupt the process of healing from grief, and will create additional loss.
- **Listen.** Affirm the child's experience by reflecting back what he is saying. "It sounds like you miss your Dad," validates his grief experience and opens up communication.
- **Help the child identify their emotions.**
- Children may grieve less if they see you **engaging and working with their birth parents.**
- **Encourage involvement** in healthy physical activities.
- **Start or continue the child's life book.**
- **Be aware of difficult transitions** and be ready to be supportive.
- **Be aware of individual differences** as well as situations. A child who has been in multiple placements will have a different set of grieving tasks than a child entering her first foster home.

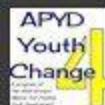
How to help incoming foster children

#Grief5

Foster
care

30% of foster
alumni are
diagnosed
with PTSD.
This is 2 x
the rate of
U.S. combat vets.

USOdep.blogs.gov



@youth4change

@Ideas4you

@NotEnoughC



Repost & Regram App

Multiple Placements

- It is typical for youth with behavioral problems in foster care to experience multiple family placements.
- Multiple placements leave children confused, scared, and grieving for previous families.
- Multiple placements are to be avoided as much as possible



How to help foster children who leave



- Give them permission to express their feelings
- In addition to accepting a child's feelings, help them to identify them
- Talk straight to the child about why they are leaving and where they are going
- Make a life book or souvenir box
- Share information about the child with the social worker so the best plan can be made for the child's next placement
- Give the child permission to leave you
- Do not let the child "make" you reject them



How to help your children

- ❖ Talk straight with your own children about the move and why
- ❖ Give them permission to identify and express their feelings about the move
- ❖ Communicate the positive aspects
- ❖ Allow them to say goodbye to the foster child
- ❖ Allow them to grieve the loss as well
- ❖ Show your feelings of sadness to the children, as it is normal

50 SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH KIDS

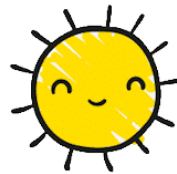
<http://www.andnextcomesL.com>

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Have a dance party | 28. Go out for ice cream |
| 2. Play a game | 29. Give each other massages |
| 3. Unplug & read a book | 30. Call or FaceTime with family or friends |
| 4. Exercise | 31. Watch funny videos on YouTube |
| 5. Go for a bike ride | 32. Listen to music |
| 6. Go for a walk or a hike | 33. Take a nap |
| 7. Cuddle up & watch a movie | 34. Learn something new |
| 8. Paint your nails | 35. Listen to an audiobook |
| 9. Diffuse essential oils | 36. Write poetry |
| 10. Draw, paint, or craft | 37. Skip rocks on a pond |
| 11. Journal | 38. Make an inspiration collage |
| 12. Write a collaborative story | 39. Go fishing |
| 13. Bake or cook a meal | 40. Go berry picking |
| 14. Order take out or go out for supper | 41. Explore a new museum, park, or area of town/city |
| 15. Drink warm beverages | 42. Scrapbook |
| 16. Do some Mad Libs | 43. Take silly pictures |
| 17. Just play! | 44. Write things you like about yourself & your child & have them do the same |
| 18. Watch music videos on YouTube | 45. Plan a trip to somewhere you've never been before |
| 19. Go swimming | 46. Do a puzzle |
| 20. Go to the library & pick out books | 47. Brush and/or braid each other's hair |
| 21. Tell jokes | 48. Lay in a hammock & cuddle, read, or talk |
| 22. Meditate | 49. Build a fort & play a game or read inside it |
| 23. Do yoga | 50. Go to a pet store & watch the fish swim around |
| 24. Blow bubbles | |
| 25. Garden | |
| 26. Go on a picnic | |
| 27. Swing at the park | |

Self-Care & Mental Health for Kids



Share your own feelings to encourage self-awareness.



Set aside time for low-stress or solo activities.



Find social groups that help them feel like they belong.



Focus on articulating feelings.
"I am angry."
"I am sad."

Encourage journaling and diaries.



Practice self-care for yourself to set the standard.



Encourage your child to focus on the moment.



Establish a self-care routine.

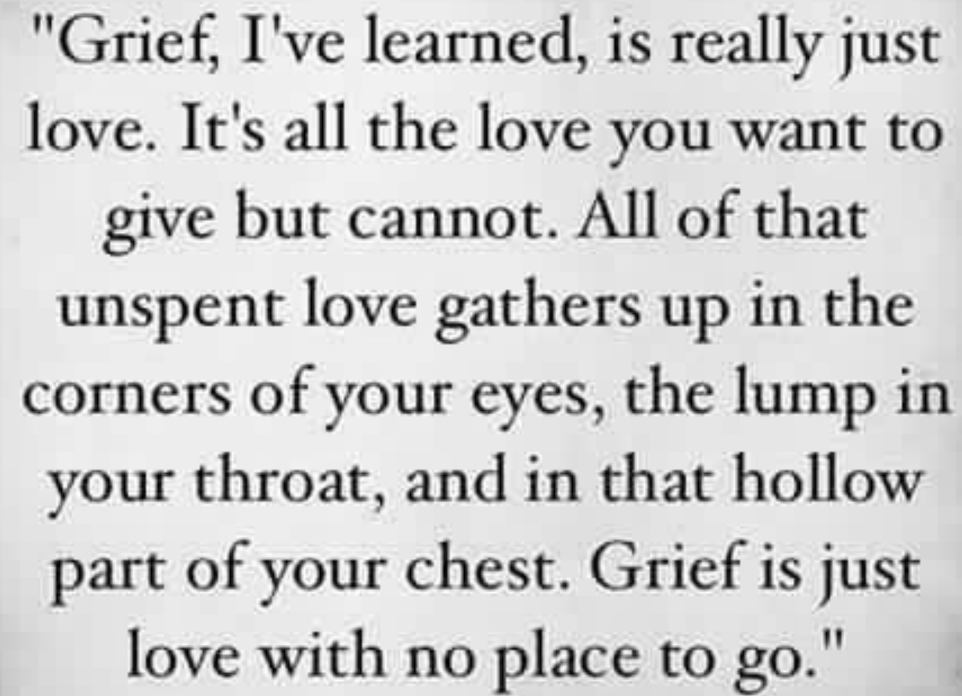
Recognize toxic stress events.

Blessing Manifesting

Cultivate interests and hobbies.

Grief and Loss Part 3



A quote about grief and love is centered on a rectangular background with a mottled, greyish texture. The text is in a black, serif font and is arranged in eight lines. The entire image is framed by a thick blue border.

"Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give but cannot. All of that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go."

The risk of love
is loss, and the
price of loss is
grief - But the
pain of grief is
only a shadow
when compared
with the pain
of never
risking love.
Hilary Stanton
Zunin

- *sayinggoodbye.org*

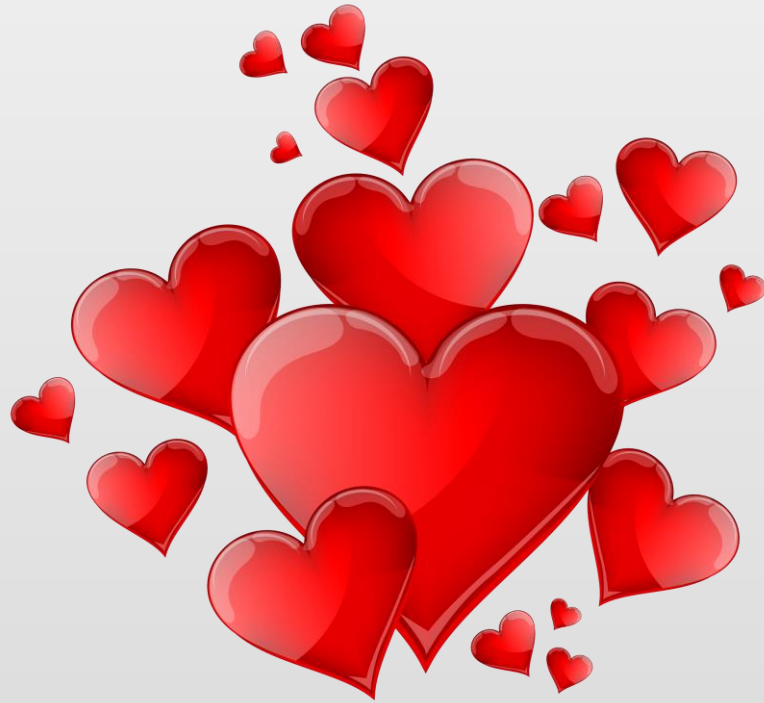
Although I'm not their mother
I care for them each day.
I cuddle, sing, and read to them
And watch them as they play.

I see each new accomplishment.
I help them grown and learn.
I understand their language,
I listen with concern.

They come to me for comfort,
And I kiss away their tears.
They proudly show their work to me,
I give the loudest cheers!

No, I am not their mother,
But my role is just as strong.
I nurture them and keep them safe.
Though maybe not for long.

I know someday the time will come,
When we will have to part.
But I know each child I cared for
Is forever in my heart!



Forever In My Heart

Author
Unknown

- <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/foster-care/pdf/grief-factsheet.pdf>
- <https://adoptionsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Supporting-Foster-Parents-Through-Loss-Grief-Article.pdf>
- <https://wifostercareandadoption.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/07/griefloss.pdf>
- <https://youthtoday.org/2016/03/foster-parents-should-grieve-when-a-child-leaves-their-family/>
- <https://www.avgffa.org/2018/05/01/grieving-a-foster-childs-departure/>
- <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ExperiencingGrief.pdf>
- <https://wifostercareandadoption.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/01/whatgrieflookslike.pdf>
- <https://adoptionsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Supporting-Foster-Parents-Through-Loss-Grief-Article.pdf>
- <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/foster-care/pdf/grief-factsheet.pdf>

Resources

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