

Play Therapy: Helping Children Cope with Trauma & Stress

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History: How children were viewed

Miniature
Adults

Seen and Not
heard

Not allowed
to express
negative
emotions

Common models include

Myer, Lewis. & James (2013)

- ▶ Assessment
- ▶ Establish Contact/Build Rapport
- ▶ Control / Understanding the Current situation
- ▶ Provide Support / Ensure Safety
- ▶ Express Emotions/ Assess Past Coping skills
- ▶ Restore Cognitive Function/ Make a Plan
- ▶ Commitment / Referral/ Follow-Up

Adult Crisis Model

- ▶ Understand the Significance of presenting issue
- ▶ Rationale (use notes to stay on track)
- ▶ Use Summaries & Questions in your personal notes.
- ▶ Identify A Realistic time frame and limited resources
- ▶ Crisis Intervention are draining; use resources for YOURSELF CARE

Understanding Stress Reactions in Children

- Children experience very different reactions to stressful situations and often take cues from the adults in their life.
- Allow children to express negative emotions and behaviors and replace with positive behaviors
- Use relaxation techniques
- Teach coping and communication skills (identify emotions)

Working with Children

- ▶ Intervention changes from moment to moment with the cycle of stability/instability
- ▶ Children can quickly move from calm to distraught
- ▶ Track behavior of children rather than use praise

Theories: Chronic Stress/Loss

- ▶ Kubler-Ross (1969) Denial—Anger—Bargaining—Depression—Acceptance.
- ▶ Pattison (1977) Contradiction & Integration of Feelings.
- ▶ Corr (1991-92) Four Dimensions of Coping.
- ▶ Do these really apply to Children?

Theories: The Unexpected

- ▶ Kubler-Ross may apply to survivors.
- ▶ Denial—Anger-Questioning??-
Depression—Acceptance.
- ▶ Pattison- may apply Contradiction &
Integration of Feelings.
- ▶ Corr-may apply to survivors.
- ▶ Dimensions of Coping.

The Grieving Process

- ▶ Standard theory:
 - ▶ Acknowledge the reality of the loss.
 - ▶ Work through emotional turmoil.
 - ▶ Adjust to an environment w/o deceased.
 - ▶ Loosen ties to the deceased.
 - ▶ Recovery.

How Children process

(Fogarty, 2000):

- ▶ Numb & Stunned (protect children from being overwhelmed & let them know something significant has happened).
- ▶ Children may not experience the emotions the way adults do sending a message that something is wrong with them.
- ▶ Children experience “magical thoughts” about the event.
- ▶ Children may “act out.”

How Children process:

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- ▶ Re-Creation of Past Experiences: May attempt to “re-create” past experiences with that loved one. These attempts fail thus allowing children to process the loss over time and prevent long term denial.
- ▶ Anguish: teaches children that great loss = great love.
- ▶ Anger: May “Act out” or be passive aggressive

Magical thoughts:

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- ▶ Magical Thoughts + Cognitive Distortions > Defense mechanisms > Personality Disorders
- ▶ “Magical thought is a child’s inaccurate conclusion (s) regarding a loss experience resulting in the child believing that he/she is responsible for the loss and needs to fix it
- ▶ “Cognitive Distortions are restricting patterns of thought that fuel magical thought to develop into potential defensive mechanisms that can lead to personality disorders. (Fogerty, 2000, p.53).”

Example:

- ▶ Magical Thought: "When I am perfect, my parents feel better and I feel better so all I have to do is be perfect."
- ▶ Cognitive Distortion: "The *only* way to feel better is by being compulsively perfectionistic."
- ▶ Defense Mechanism: "When I am stressed by others or life, I will *choose* to be compulsively perfectionistic."
- ▶ Personality Disorder: I cannot control my compulsive perfectionism.

Reframing a Problem.

- Distorted Thought:
This will never get better. No one will care if I was here or not.
 - Realistic Thought:
The family made adjustments in the past to smaller crisis, we will all get through this together.
- ▶ Distorted Thought: everything is lost, we will never rebuild..
 - ▶ Realistic Thought: IT will take time, rebuilding is a process and we can change what we did not like in the past

The Counselor needs to Help the Child:

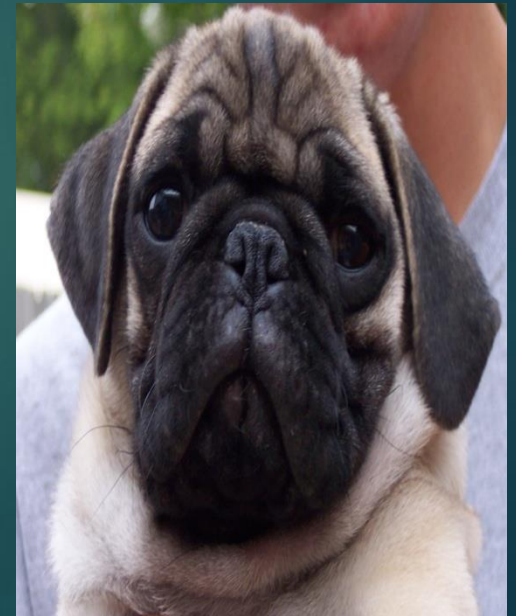
- ▶ Accept the reality of the loss.
- ▶ Work through the Pain of grief
- ▶ Adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing.
- ▶ Withdraw the emotional energy invested in the deceased relationship and focus it towards another healthy relationship.
- ▶ Convert the relationship with the deceased from one of present to a relationship of memory.

Helping Children move Forward

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- ▶ They can have symbolic items that will move with them to adult hood.
- ▶ Pet: Picture, ceramic or stuffed animal.

(When I get my own place...I will have a Pet like this)



Helping Families Bounce Back

- Teach Families what to expect during transition time after Crisis.
- Help them understand changes in world view as a result of Crisis

Individual Changes/ Family Changes

- Discuss Family roles before Crisis and how those roles have changed after crisis.
- Discuss issues of “self-worth” and changes in world view as a result of the crisis
- Family members may feel more dependent and may have trouble adapting to changes that occurred as a result of crisis.
- Help families deal with financial changes that may result from crisis.

Compassion Fatigue

- ▶ Figley (1993, 1995) defined it “as the natural and consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.
- ▶ Figley later coined the term compassion fatigue to describe the cognitive emotional behavioral changes that caregivers experience from indirect exposure to trauma survivors or suffering person’ (p. 7).

Reported Symptoms

- ▶ Helping professionals have reported symptoms:
- ▶ intrusive secondary trauma-related thoughts or memories
- ▶ avoidance behaviors,
- ▶ sleep disturbances,
- ▶ irritability,
- ▶ dissociation

(Bride, 2004; Dane & Chachkes, 2001; McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

Self-Care at Work

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- ▶ Become Aware of Your Emotional and Physical Reactions.
- ▶ Notice your distress. Don't ignore it.
- ▶ Know your limitations, Physical, Emotional, Psychological.
- ▶ Manage your time (at work and home).

Self-Attunement

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- ▶ Adjust your home environment.
- ▶ Loosen mental ties to work when you are at home.
- ▶ Take time to Refresh & Recover from your stress.
- ▶ Focus on building your identity apart from your job.

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