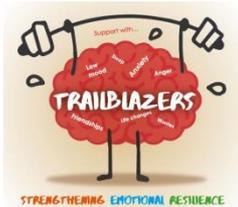


Coping with Loss



Siobhán Baker
Haringey Trailblazer Team Leader

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey 
Mental Health NHS Trust

Loss

Most people will experience loss at some point in their lives.

Grief is a reaction to any form of loss.

Losses which can cause grief

- ▶ Divorce or parental separation
- ▶ Loss of health
- ▶ Loss of a pet
- ▶ Loss of a friendship
- ▶ Loss of safety after trauma
- ▶ Selling family home
- ▶ Break up– first loves
- ▶ Foster Care

- ▶ Loss of job
- ▶ Loss of financial stability
- ▶ Retirement
- ▶ Loss of a cherished dream

Covid 19 & Loss

Children and young people can suffer other losses due to Covid-19, including:

- ▶ School life
 - ▶ Transitions
 - ▶ Social opportunities
 - ▶ Friendships
 - ▶ Loss of family contacts/worries about relatives – missing hugs/ connection from family
 - ▶ Loss of routine impacting motivation and mood
 - ▶ Economic/loss of employment)
- 

Loss Across the Stages

Primary School:

- ▶ Loss of independence– trust in ability
- ▶ Opportunity for failure
- ▶ Social Skills

Secondary School:

- ▶ Social skills
- ▶ Relationships
- ▶ Identity

University

- ▶ Living away from home

Adult losses

- ▶ Finding time for self– self care
- ▶ Separating own time from work/family/home schooling

Potential Losses

Perhaps you are worried about losses which have not happened yet, for example:

- ▶ Job
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Housing
- 

Uncertainty for Family



We need to be mindful of what messages children receive from the family about their ability to take on challenges and cope. Some messages may make children doubt their ability and worry about life's challenges.

- ▶ If a child feels worried due to the messages around challenges and their ability to cope the we can:
 - Use **Validation** – we can explore these feelings and refocus on the young person as able to cope
 - **Build Helpful Thoughts** – reframe the worry with Positive Self-Talk and Thought Challenging; We can do this!

- ▶ If you as an adult are feeling anxious yourself or for your child you may need to give some attention to this. Your anxiety may well bounce of your child's like a bumper car, worrying you both. If you feel anxious you can...
 - Use strategies as above as well as: Testing the Water, Step-by-Step plans.
 - Model your Anxiety – managing your own challenges is a powerful opportunity to show your young person that it's ok to face difficulties, its ok to share how you feel and that people are able to work through challenges.

- ▶ Finally, it is important to spend time caring for yourself and recognising your efforts. You may want to reflect and allow yourself to feel proud of how far you've come, you may want to allow yourself to relax after your efforts or reward yourself to stay happy and motivated.



Some Emotional Responses

- ▶ Anxiety
 - ▶ Sadness
 - ▶ Avoidance
 - ▶ Difficulty communicating
 - ▶ Extreme tiredness
 - ▶ Anger / acting out
 - ▶ Difficulty sleeping
 - ▶ Physical complaints
 - ▶ Guilt
- 

Sadness

Some of the important reasons for sadness are:

- ▶ to encourage you to find support and comfort from someone who cares about you:
 - ▶ to let you know that something needs your attention;
 - ▶ to signal to other people that you might need some love, kindness or comfort;
 - ▶ to give you the opportunity to withdraw, so you can be still and quiet for long enough to get clarity around whatever has made you feel sad.
- 

Impact of Loss

- ▶ The pain of loss is related to the **nature of the transition**. When loss is sudden and unexpected, there is much less time for the child to begin adjusting. The anticipated death, separation, or move is easier because there has been time to think, mourn and slowly reshape relationships. Gradual, predictable transitions, though painful, make loss easier to deal with.
- ▶ The pain from loss is also related to the **nature of the relationship**. A child experiences the most distress when they are close to and dependent upon the one they are separated from. If the move or the separation takes the child away from the loved one, they may experience a more intense pain.

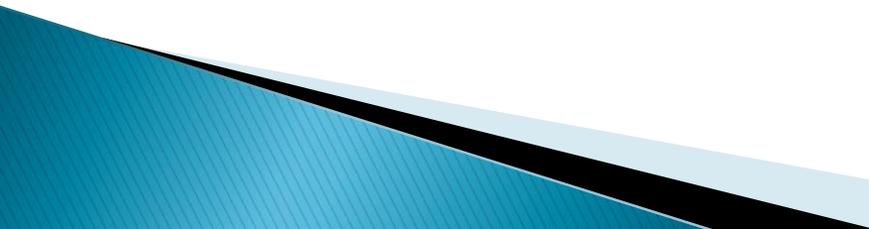
Some Notes on Age

- ▶ In **young children**, the child's egocentric magical thinking can cause them to misunderstand the causes of the separation and loss. It is important that adults identify the child's personal magical thinking about the loss. Do they think they caused the loss? Do they think they can do something to reverse it?
- ▶ **School-age** children become acutely aware of differences between themselves and their peers and these sometimes lead to problem behaviours with peers.
- ▶ The peer group can be very important for **teenagers** and 'acting out' behaviours are worrying for caregivers. It is important to give young people space to process their changing emotions whilst trying to maintain usual boundaries and rules, will help them to feel safe at a confusing time.

Some signals of need

- ▶ Change in behaviour or a marked change in school performance
 - ▶ A lot of worry or anxiety manifested in refusing to go to school, sleep or do usual activities
 - ▶ Not talking about the loss. Physically avoiding mention of the loss.
 - ▶ Frequent angry outbursts
 - ▶ Hyperactivity, constant movement beyond regular playing
 - ▶ Persistent anxieties or phobias
 - ▶ Persistent nightmares
 - ▶ Complaints of physical ailments
 - ▶ Long term absence of emotion
 - ▶ Risk taking behaviours
 - ▶ Social withdrawal
 - ▶ Substance misuse
- 

Talking About Loss With Children

1. **Don't be afraid to talk about loss.** Children do not benefit from "not thinking about it" or "putting it out of their minds." Share important facts about the event and try to get a sense of what the children think about the loss in general.
 2. During these initial conversations, **try to understand what the children think about the loss.** Do they have a view? Do they place blame on one person or another or on themselves? The more you understand about how the child thinks about loss, the easier it will be for you to talk about it in a meaningful way.
 3. Sometimes children act as if they have not heard anything you have said, but they have. Remember that in the midst of distressing experiences, children are not very capable of processing complex or abstract information. **Be prepared to repeat the same information again and again.**
- 

Continued...

4. **If children sense that you are upset by the loss, they may not bring the topic up even when they want to.** Be a good role model; showing children how to express emotions in a healthy way. It can be very helpful for children to know that you have been affected by the event and that you are willing to talk about how you feel.
 5. **Watch the silence:** Children might not have the words or the self-awareness to articulate what they are feeling. Be careful not to interpret their silence as a sign that everything is fine. Check in with them from time to time. Sometimes their silence will be okay and the best thing will be to give them the space to make sense of what they're feeling. Sometimes though, their silence might be a sign that they need help to put words to what they're feeling, to make sense of what has happened, or that they are waiting for someone to hold them steady.
- 

Looking after Yourself

- * 5 things you can see
- * 4 things you can touch
- * 3 things you can hear
- * 2 things you can smell
- * 1 thing you can taste

Controlled Breathing

1. Put one hand on your chest and one on your stomach.
2. Take a deep breath in through your nose for 7 seconds; both hands should rise gently as you breathe.
3. Hold for 2 seconds
4. Release your breath slowly for 11 seconds
5. Practice



“I can get through this”

“Remember to breathe”

“I can learn from this”

“This is difficult but it’s only temporary”

Finally.....

- ▶ All feelings have an important reason for being there. It's never the feeling that causes the problem, but what we do with it. Pushing it away, pretending it doesn't exist will only help in the short term. Being able to identify, accept and understand feelings is at the heart of emotional intelligence.
- ▶ Sadness is something that we are motivated to avoid, but it's not an enemy. It's because of our desire to avoid sadness that we look after the people and things that are important to us. Sometimes though, sadness falls upon us anyway. The more we can help our children to understand why they feel what they do, the more we'll be able flourish their capacity to have full, healthy relationships, and a vibrant, whole-hearted life.

Thank You

- ▶ If you have any questions or comments please get in touch with myself or the Anchor Approach Team.
 - ▶ siobhan.baker1@nhs.net
 - ▶ anchor@haringey.gov.uk
- 