

MOVING THROUGH GRIEF: HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S GRIEF USING MOVEMENT AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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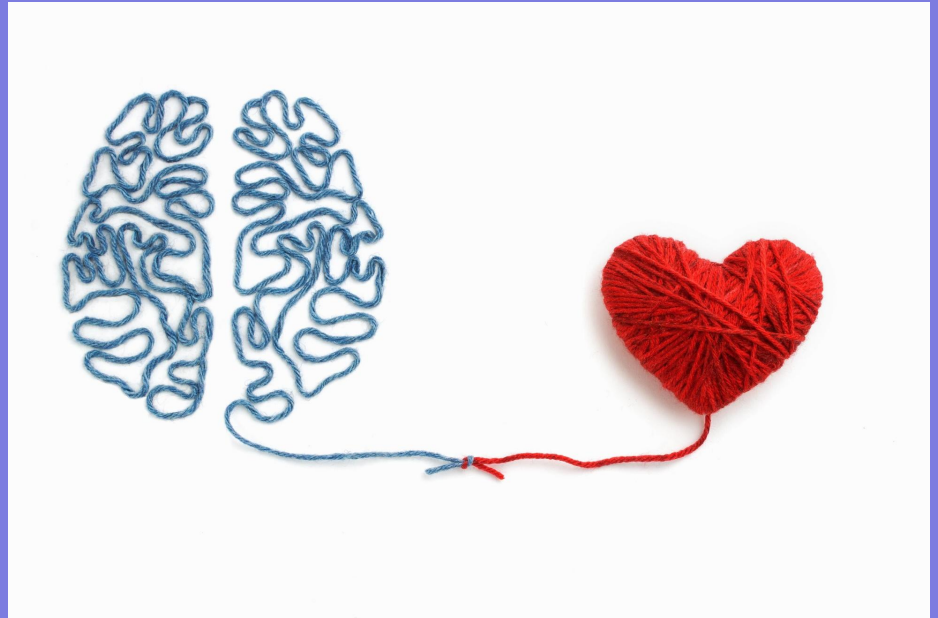
PERSONAL LENS & EXPERIENCE





CHECK IN

WHAT IS GRIEF?



GRIEF IS...

A **Normal** and **Natural**
Response to Loss

Grief effects an
individual on all levels

- Physical
 - Emotional
 - Cognitive
 - Behavioral
 - Spiritual
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WHAT IS GRIEF CONTD.

- Grief is **Nonlinear** and **Non-finite**
- Grief is **Unique** to each individual
- **Children grieve differently than adults**
- There is an interconnectivity between children's grief and stage of development
- Grief is **Contextual**: "Grief is not solely an individual experience; grief is interwoven in a sociocultural context, influenced by family, community, and other social systems" (Schurrman & Mitchell, 2020).



GRIEF CAN HAVE A
LIFELONG IMPACT
ON THE PHYSICAL BODY



PHYSICAL RESPONSES TO GRIEF

All of these physical responses to grief **can change on a daily basis**

- Stomach Aches
 - Nausea
 - Insomnia
 - Weight Loss or Weight Gain
 - Overall Loss of or increase in energy
 - Higher Cortisol levels
 - Oversensitivity to noise
 - Tightness in Chest
 - Shortness of breath
 - Increased illnesses
 - GI Upset
 - Dizziness
 - Soreness of muscles
-

1 IN 13 CHILDREN

In the state of Virginia will experience the death of a
parent or sibling by the age of 18

(Judi's House JAG Institute CBEM, 2023)

DEVELOPMENTAL
RESPONSES TO GRIEF

AGES 5-8

Often see death as reversible

Sometimes feel responsible for the death and worry they caused it by their behaviors or thoughts

Responses:

- Disrupted sleep
- Changes in eating habits
- Repetitive questions "why?"
- Regressive behaviors or changes in behavior such as high/low energy, hitting/kicking
- Nightmares
- Physical complaints ie. Stomachache, headache, body pain

AGES 9-12

Start to understand death is permanent and how it might effect them longterm

Focus on details of what happened to the body

Feelings of guilt and regret- thinking they caused the death

Responses:

- Big energy behaviors that may be seen as acting out
- Anxiety/Worry about something bad happening
- Concern for safety for self and others
- Nightmares or intrusive thoughts
- Use play and talk to recreate the event
- Detailed questions about death and dying
- Wide range of emotions
- Hypervigilance or increased sensitivity
- Withdrawal from social situations

AGES 13-18

While they understand death is permanent, they may have unspoken magical thinking around the death

Start to question meaning of life, death, and other traumatic events

Responses:

- Withdrawal from family or other support networks
- Increased risk of drugs/alcohol, risky behaviors, reckless driving
- Inability to concentrate (in school), pushing themselves to be perfect
- Difficulty sleeping/exhaustion
- Lack of appetite or eating too much
- Unpredictable or intense emotional reactions
- Uncomfortable talking about the death with parents/guardians
- Worry about safety
- Fear of death
- Confusion of role identity in family
- Thoughts of suicide or self harm
- Hypervigilance or increased sensitivity

GRIEF & CREATIVE EXPRESSION



IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF GRIEF

- “Grief is an experience that often lacks a language and can at times, (particularly for children), be challenging to express” (McNeil & Gabbay, 2018)
- Humans are capable of and desire individual expression in order to overcome a loss
- Nonverbal release of feelings often occurs more willingly, especially for children

TYPES OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

- Art
- Music
- Movement/Dance
- Sand Tray
- Guided
Meditation
- Journaling
- Play



"THERE ARE ALWAYS THOSE PARTS OF GRIEF
THAT ARE THAT PERSON'S ALONE AND
MAY NEVER FIND EXPRESSION VERBALLY
OR OTHERWISE, BUT NONETHELESS ARE AN
IMPORTANT PART OF SHAPING WHO A
PERSON IS BECOMING AND HOW HE OR
SHE WILL COPE"

(MCNIEL & GABBAY, 2018).

DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY



DEFINITION

Dance Movement Therapy is the psychotherapeutic use of movement **to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration** of the individual, for the **purpose of improving health and well-being**

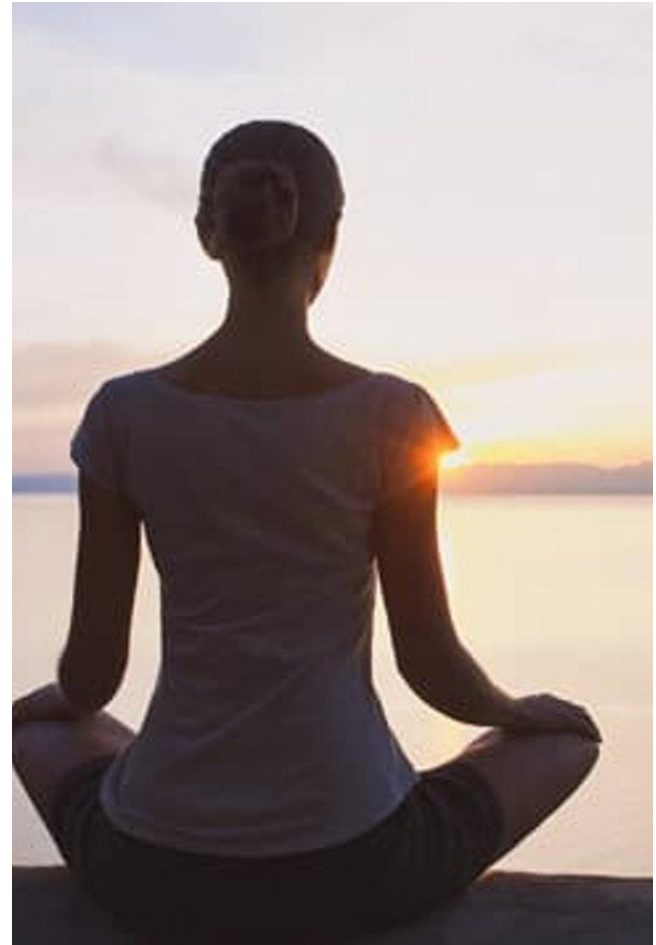


AMERICAN DANCE
THERAPY ASSOCIATION

DEFINITION CONTD.

This **holistic approach to healing** is based on the notion that “mind, body, and spirit are inseparable and interconnected”

This means that “**changes in the body reflect changes in the mind** and vice versa”



ELEMENTS OF DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY CONNECTED TO GRIEF

- Therapeutic Movement Relationship
 - Attunement/Mirroring
 - Kinesthetic Empathy
 - Kinesthetic Awareness
 - Ritual
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ATTUNEMENT/MIRRORING

- **Mirroring** happens when a therapist reflects back via her own muscular activity and verbal narration what she perceives and experiences in the body action and body of the client
- **Mirroring**, as opposed to mimicry, involves:
 - the incorporation of meaning into the movement and not just the action of copying the movement itself
 - the expansion, broadening, and clarifying of the clients non-verbal and symbolic communication
- **Mirroring** helps to validate the clients direct experience of themselves and allows dance movement therapists to embody the feelings and lived experience of another



KINESTHETIC EMPATHY

- **Kinesthetic empathy** refers to a therapist's emotional reactions derived both from observing and from experiencing a child's movements by trying them on
- This process occurs by first being present in the moment, observing and embodying a child's actions through experiencing, mirroring, and attunement
- Using kinesthetic empathy allows a therapist to be both empathetically and physically present
- Similar to understanding grief, the therapist cannot entirely understand how the child is feeling, but instead understands how it feels to be in relationship with the child in the experience

MIRRORING
EXPERIENTIAL

ONLINE RESOURCES

Coalition to Support Grieving Students:
[Grievingstudents.org](https://grievingstudents.org)

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement: [Schoolcrisiscenter.org](https://schoolcrisiscenter.org)

Dougy Center The National Center for Grieving Children and Families: [Dougy.org](https://dougy.org)

National Alliance for Children's Grief:
[Childrengrieve.org](https://childrengrieve.org)

Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families: [Berevedparenting.org](https://bereavedparenting.org)

ONLINE
RESOURCES
CONTD.

Eluna Network: Elunanetwork.org

Judi's House/JAG Institute:
Judishouse.org

What's Your Grief: Whatsyourgrief.com

Kids Grief Support: kidsgriefsupport.com

Experience Camps: Experiencecamps.org

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing
wendtcenter.org

Hope for Grieving Families:
hopeforgrievingfamilies.org

Nova Grief Support and Counseling:
novagrieffsupport.com

Ryan Bartel Foundation:
ryanbartelfoundation.org

Capital Caring Kids:
capitalcaring.org/point-of-hope/

QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS

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RiVerbend
Grief and Movement Therapy LLC

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