

**Supporting families
through loss and grief**

Volunteer session

Supporting Families through loss and grief

We all experience loss and grief

- In our family life
- In our personal lives
- In our work places
- Through the grief of others

The social work service in RCH

Roles vary and may include

- Support and counselling
- Provision of practical assistance
- Advocacy and liaison with internal and external stakeholders
- Linking people to appropriate resources.

Loss and Grief

Normal part of life

Everyone deals with grief
and loss differently

Ordinary people experiencing extraordinary events

Most people don't experience

- The death of a child
- Raising a child with a severe disability or acquired brain injury
- Adjusting to a diagnosis of a chronic illness with one of their children

At RCH you may come across families who are currently experiencing loss and grief or have had a past experience and have had to adapt to major change in their lives

Trauma

- Trauma is defined as "an event which overwhelms the organism and dramatically and negatively disrupts homeostasis"(Perry 1998)
 - Traumas may be "discrete, encapsulate events such as a drowning, MVA or medical emergency
- Or
- pervasive such as non accidental injuries or family domestic violence"

Precipitators of Loss and Grief

- A child's illness or accident
- Awaiting a diagnosis
- A child with a severe disability or acquired brain injury
- Death of a child

Impacts of grief and loss

Emotional impacts

We all express emotions differently

Our emotional expression can be influenced by

- Our culture
- Our gender
- Our family rules

People may express shock, anger or guilt

Impacts of grief and loss

Physical impacts

People may display physical responses such as

- Dry mouth
- Shaking uncontrollably
- Auditory disruption
- Upset stomachs
- Variations in body temperature

Impacts of grief and loss

Social impacts

- Changes to work and family life
- Financial hardship
- Changes in family dynamics(e.g less available for other children; separation of family unit if one parent has to spend extended time in hospital with one child)
- Exacerbation of conflict if parents are separated or alternatively a coming together because of the trauma/crisis.

Impacts of grief and loss

Psychological impacts

- a sense of loss of control
- Vulnerability because of contact with an unknown environment
- Triggering of memory of other life losses
- Anxiety
- Depression

Impacts of grief and loss

Cognitive impacts

- Confusion
- inability to take in information

Volunteers

Your role is unique

You are part of a team

Refer to others

Helping people experiencing loss and grief

- Our natural response as caring people is to try to fix things when people are distressed
- For many families, there is no immediate way to “fix” their situation.
- For many families life will never be the same again

Helpful things social workers can do

- Being with the person and judging when the person needs alone time or time with loved ones
- Providing and allowing choice and support parents to ask questions
- Ensure information is provided regularly and advocate where needed
- Attending to basic practical needs(e.g warm clothing; water and food; showing families the location of toilets; provision of phone chargers; provision of a private space; assisting with accommodation and financial support if needed)

Unhelpful things

- Telling people that everything will be alright
- Self disclosure about a similar situation you may have been in
- Crying or becoming overly emotional in front of the family.

Case examples

- Let's talk about how this all translates into the real world of supporting families through loss and grief

Self Care as a volunteer

Remember you are part of a team

- How will you look after yourself as an RCH volunteer?
- Who can you talk to if you are distressed by what you have seen or heard?
- Remember you can talk to your Volunteer Mentor or supervisor, the social worker in the area or Pastoral care.

Remember to care for others, you must firstly care for yourself

Thankyou and Welcome

Bonnie Travers
Senior Social Worker
Emergency department
Aug 2014

