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Death and Dying Issues

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Description of the topic

Death and dying is a complicated and multifaceted topic. This Practice Brief will focus on death and dying, the counseling process, and those facing death. Also, the Practice Brief will cover caregivers who work with the dying, cultural and age differences, and the spiritual aspects related to this topic.

An early description of the 2(f)-29.8(w)-15.9(il)-4.8(e) distress and the personal and interpersonal experience of loss is the process model of moving between grief and coming to terms with the loss. Complicated grief is described as an individual having continual beliefs related to a death and functional impairment that lasts at least 6 months (Lobb, Kristjansen, Auon, Monterosso, Halkett, & Davies, 2010). Noppe (2006) and Daneker and Smith (2007) examined the existential or spiritual aspects of defining, understanding, and finding meaning with death, dying, and the grief process.

Death Education

Ethical therapeutic competence is necessary for any professional working with client issues related to death and dying (Gamino, & Ritter, 2012). Educational experiences can include planned activities and experiences relating to understanding the meaning of death, dying, and other aspects of the grief process (Noppe, 2006). Related factors that influence the grieving style include personality, culture, and gender role socialization (Doka & Martin, 2011).

Harrawood, Doughty and Wilde (2011) posited that death education increased understanding of death, reduced negativity about death and increased openness to studying death constructs. Counseling competencies, including (a) work environment competence. The competencies, as described by Chan and Tin, allow professionals focus on necessary knowledge and skills to cope with death work.

VonDras and White (2006) examined the role that spiritual beliefs and practices played in the processing of the death experience including comfort for family members and hope for the dying in end-of-life care. The authors suggested that caregivers may go through a cycle of shock and grief and return to composure and function. Potential counseling issues for caregivers include putting loss and suffering into perspective (Rossheim & McAdams, 2010). Rubin and Malkinson (2011) focused on cultural sensitivity, individual religious experiences, and potential barriers to grief and mourning specifically for educators, counselors, caregivers, and the dying.

Identification of Issues

A number of authors have dealt with identification of issues and assessment related to loss, including ethical/legal concerns, practice considerations, and recommendations from the field. Werth and

Crow (2009) focused on all three issues while making a strong case for the use of assessment. Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, and Nath (2007) examined coping strategies in South Asian families. The researchers focused on the role of culture in the grieving process and found that effective strategies included interactions with family members and other victim families, reliving memories of the deceased, displaying emotion (anger, sadness), increasing or decreasing religious behaviors, and/or seeking support (formal and informal).

In a similar study Rubin and Malkinson (2011) examined grief and mourning cultural issues in Israel. The researchers investigated contextual issues related to minority and majority cultural issues including questions appropriate to ask a client of cultural minority groups. Rubin and Malkinson suggested that therapists should ask questions seeking information not only about the story surrounding the death, but also about the story of the life that person lived to understand the continuing bonds held. Questions

grief education. Breen (2011) suggested that this can be done by increasing understanding of grief literature, use of workshops, literature reading groups, and active research.

Theoretical Orientations

Researchers explored the use of specific theoretical constructs when dealing with grief and loss. Parkes (2011) described the relationship between attachment theory, grief and the effect of parental attachment. Boeln and Keijser (2007) compared cognitive-behavior therapy, cognitive restructuring, exposure therapy, and supportive counseling when working with complicated or debilitating grieving. Cognitive-behavior therapy was found to be effective when working with clients suffering from debilitating grief.

A number of researchers explored the effectiveness of bibliotherapy when dealing with grief, death and bereavement. Bowman (2003) described the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in helping clients to understand feelings, memories, and unconscious thoughts. Other benefits of bibliotherapy included prompting discussion, creating solutions, and normalizing the process. Briggs and Pehrsson (2008) studied 487 practitioners and found that 88% utilized bibliotherapy in the treatment of grief and loss. The authors noted that bibliotherapy is utilized primarily with children.

Other specific strategies when working with children included storytelling and bereavement camp. Glazer and Marcum (2003) focused on the power of hearing and telling stories to create meaning for expressing grief. McClatchey and Wimmer (2012) examined bereavement camp experiences and found the experience beneficial for children and adolescents.

Palliative care strategies

Tubbs-Cooley, Santucci, Kang, Feinstein, Hexem, and Feudtner (2011) described specific issues related to end of life, bereavement and palliative care with the goal of facilitating a dignified death. Issues included “lack of communication among physicians, nurses and families, lack of defined treatment plan, discomfort with death and dying unnecessary prolongation of life, and lack of resources” (Tubbs-Cooley, et. al, 2011, p.31). Currier, Holland and Neimeyer (2008) also examined helping strategies for end of life issues for the dying and grieving. The researchers gathered information from 119 practitioners and found that

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