



**National Training and
Development Curriculum**
FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



SEPARATION, GRIEF, AND LOSS

FACILITATOR CLASSROOM GUIDE
Modified January 2022

PREPARATION

To prepare for this class, you should:

- Review the facilitator preparation information included in this **Guide** along with the handouts.
- Review the Resources for this theme found on CapLEARN (<https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>) or NTDC website (<https://ntdcportal.org/>).
- Develop an agenda that includes this theme and any other themes you will be conducting along with it during the class.
- Ensure that participants have a copy of the **Participant Resource Manual**. This **Manual** will be used during all themes and will include the handouts needed by participants. Facilitators should have copies of the handouts for the theme available in case participants do not bring their **Manual** to class. If the theme is being taught on a remote platform, facilitators should have the handouts available so that they can share in the chat and/or email to participants who do not have their **Manual**.
- Bring any materials you need for the activities.
- Bring any materials you need for the activities.
- Review any videos or other electronic media used in this theme, if any, and plan the mechanics of how you will present them. Media for this theme are listed in the Materials and Handouts slide. Review the instructions for each media clip (e.g., to pause or stop at a particular time stamp). The videos can be played in different ways, including:
 - Play them from a flash drive or the computer's hard drive using a media player app
 - Link to them from CapLEARN or the NTDC website.
- Practice playing the media for the theme. Ensure that you have the files and apps you need, that your links and connections work, and that you know when to pause or stop the media clip if appropriate.
- If training on a remote platform, make sure all participants have the link available to access the class and that you have all videos, PPT's and handouts ready for use.
- If training in person, ensure that a room is available and set up, with the following:
 - Enough tables and chairs for all participants
 - Projector and screen (check that it works with the computer you will be using)
- Classroom-based activities have been adapted so that they can be done on a remote platform. Adaptations will be marked as follows so that they can be easily spotted throughout the Facilitator Classroom Guide: ***Adaptation for Remote Platform***



MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

- Participants are expected to have the **Participant Resource Manual** available for every session.

MATERIALS NEEDED

You will need the following if conducting the session in the classroom:

- A screen and projector (test before the session with the computer and cables you will use.)
- A flipchart or whiteboard and markers for several of the activities. A flipchart with a sticky backing on each sheet may be useful and will allow you to post completed flipchart sheets on the wall for reference.
- Name tent cards (use the name tent cards made during the Introduction and Welcome theme.)

You will need the following if conducting the session via a remote platform:

- Access to a strong internet connection
- A back-up plan in the event your internet and/or computer do not work
- A computer that has the ability to connect to a remote platform- Zoom is recommended

HANDOUTS

Have the following handouts accessible. Participants will have all handouts listed below in their **Participant Resource Manual**.

- Handout #1: Developmental Stages of Grief
- Handout #2: Theories of the Stages of Grief in Foster Care and Adoption: Common Grief Responses for Children
- Handout #3: Ambiguous Loss Haunts Foster and Adopted Children
- Handout #4: Case Study: Addressing Darren's Grief
- Handout #5: Case Study: Addressing Darren's Grief (for Kinship Caregivers)

VIDEOS AND PODCASTS

Before the day you facilitate this class, decide how you will show/play the media items, review any specific instructions for the theme, and do a test drive. You may wish to set up the media to the start point. Videos can be found on the NTDC website or CapLEARN.

(<https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>) or NTDC website (<https://ntdcportal.org/>).

The following media will be used in this theme:

- Podcast: Podcast *Understanding Grief and Loss in Foster and Adoptive Children* by Dr. Gregory Manning (10:18 minutes)
- *Separation, Grief and Loss in Children and Adolescents* with Debbie Riley (7 minutes)
- Clip from documentary *FOSTER*- featuring Sydney (1:19 minutes)



EVALUATION

There is a pre- and post-survey available for every theme. If the facilitator wants to use these evaluation tools, they will need to be downloaded from the NTDC website or CapLEARN and provided to participants. Participants will need to complete the pre-survey prior to the theme and the post-survey upon completion of the theme. If conducting the class on a remote platform, the facilitator will need to put the surveys into an online format such as survey monkey.



THEME AND COMPETENCIES

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Prior to the session, review the theme and competencies. You will not read these aloud to participants. Participants can access all competencies in their **Participant Resource Manual**.

Theme: Separation, Grief, and Loss

Understand the impact of separation, ambiguous loss; learning different ways children grieve; life-long grieving and importance of providing opportunities for grieving; recognize strategies to help children deal with grief and loss; understand loss and fractured attachments with birth family members and previous placements; recognize the importance of establishing and maintaining essential relationships with and for children; understand the impact of frequent moves and the importance of managing transitions for children; understand the separation, grief and loss experienced by all members of the foster/adoption network.

Competencies

Knowledge

- Explain the various losses that children may experience and how these losses can impact their feelings and behaviors currently and in the future.
- Describe the grieving process for children and behaviors that may be associated with it.
- Define ways that children grieve and how it often looks different than the way adults express grief.
- Understand how ambiguous loss and unrecognized grief impacts children.
- Understand how to support children in acknowledging their losses and grieving them over the life cycle.
- Learn how to recognize grief and loss as the possible underlying causes of behaviors.

Attitudes

- Committed to recognizing and honoring children’s losses and helping them to grieve.
- Willing to reflect on how one’s own losses may impact their parenting experience.

Skill

- Demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors that may result from grief and loss and respond effectively in a way that considers the underlying cause of the behavior.



SUGGESTED AGENDA

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This notes page shows a suggested agenda and timing for this theme. Before the session, please review this agenda, and incorporate it into your overall agenda for this and any other themes you are conducting along with it.

AGENDA

This theme is divided into six sections. This content is based on 2 hours of classroom material (including a 10-minute break).

Prior to the Session start time	Color Wheel of Emotions exercise
20 minutes	Section 1: Introduction: Separation, Grief and Loss
25 minutes	Section 2: Unresolved Losses
25 minutes	Section 3: Grief and Loss and Behavior
10 minutes	BREAK
20 minutes	Section 4: Addressing Grief and Loss
15 minutes	Section 5: Skill Building
5 minutes	Section 6: Wrap-Up

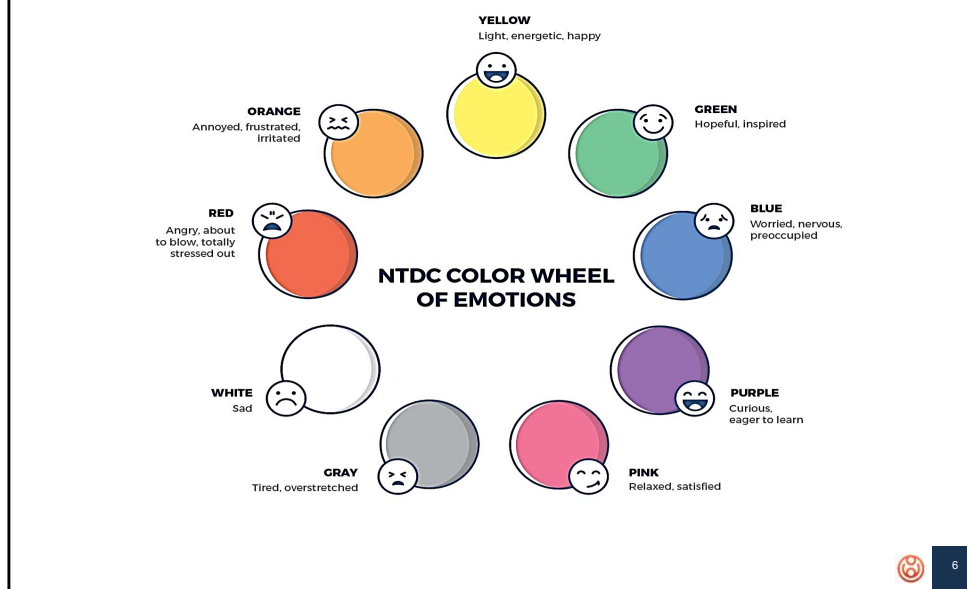
BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE CLASS

Before discussing the Color Wheel of Emotions and covering the content of this theme, you should do the following:

- Make any announcements that are needed regarding the training, timing of training, or process to become a foster or adoptive parent.
- Take out the **Participant Resource Manual** and direct participants to this theme in their **Manual**. Remind participants that the Competencies for today’s theme are in their **Manual**.
- Review the agenda for the theme. Facilitators should add a slide to the PPT deck that includes the agenda so that they can review it with participants. Make sure to include start and end times and any breaks that will be taken during the session.
- Encourage participants to be engaged and active learners.
- Encourage participants to contact you in between classes with any questions and/or concerns. (Prior to class, list the name(s) of the facilitators on the board with contact information.)
- Remind participants to put out their name tents (these can either be made by the participants during the first class or the agency can print out name tents and provide them to the participants at the first class). If conducting the class on a remote platform, remind participants to type their first and last names in their screen box.



WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Have this slide showing onscreen as participants assemble for the first class of the day. As participants come in, welcome them back and ask them to take a few minutes to do a self-check using the Color Wheel. **NOTE:** The Color Wheel should only be done one time per day; before the first theme of the day. If combining several themes together on one day, facilitate the Color Wheel at the beginning of the first class of the day as participants are coming into the room.

SAY

Welcome back. We are so glad that you have taken time out of your day to join us for another exciting learning opportunity. As you recall, tuning in to how you're doing on a daily basis may not be something everyone here is used to, but this type of regular self-check is critical for parents who are adopting or fostering children who may have experienced trauma, separation, or loss, as it will be helpful to become and stay aware of your own state of mind. It may seem like a simple exercise but be assured that knowing how we're doing on any given day strengthens our ability to know when and how we need to get support and/or need a different balance. Doing this type of check in will also help us to teach and/or model this skill for children! Please take a moment to look at the color wheel and jot down on paper the color(s) that you are currently feeling.

DO

Wait a little while to give participants time to complete the Color Wheel.

SAY

Now that everybody has had the opportunity to do a quick check in, would someone like to share what color(s) they landed on today for the Color Wheel?

DO

Call on someone who volunteers to share their color(s). If a challenging emotion or feeling is shared, thank the person and acknowledge their courage in sharing, pause for a moment, encourage everyone to take a deep breath, and transition to beginning the theme.





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SEPARATION, GRIEF AND LOSS

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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Show this slide briefly just before you start the session.

SAY

Let's get started! Welcome to the Separation, Grief and Loss theme.



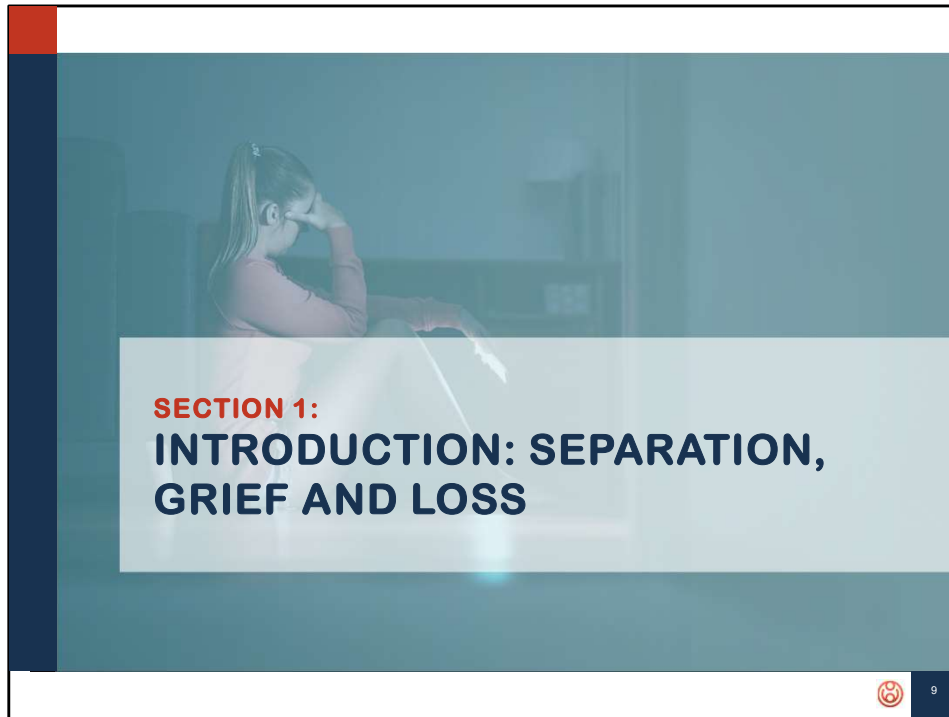


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The opening quote slide should only be used for the first theme of the day. If combining several themes together on one day, the opening quote slide would only be shown after the Color Wheel at the beginning of the first theme. It is important to always emphasize with this slide that this type of parenting involves lifelong learning and it will be critical for families to be invested in their own learning before and after a child is placed in their home.

PARAPHRASE

We are excited to share this lesson with all of you today. We are going to start with Separation, Grief, and Loss. As the slide states, this information will help to develop your capacity to support children and families. Separation, grief, and loss are key areas for understanding children who are fostered and/or adopted. So, let's dive in and see what important information we have to share with you today.

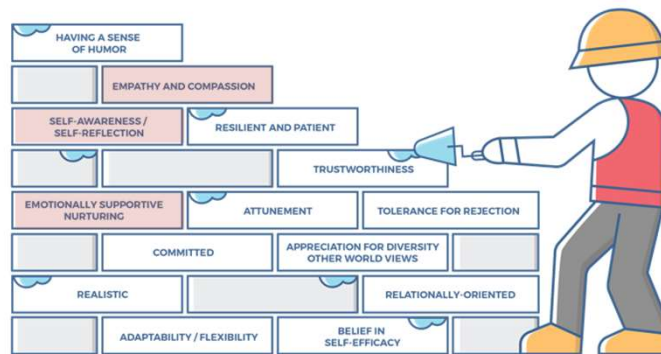


PARAPHRASE

Listed below are the main topics that we will cover during this theme:

- Children who have been in foster care or adopted frequently struggle with the impact of separation, loss, and the resulting grief.
- A child may express loss and grief through difficult behaviors, and the child's loss and grief may interfere with relationship building.
- Parents need to support the child by acknowledging and affirming the loss, and by using tools and skills to help the child communicate and understand their loss and grief.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This slide is shown at the start of each theme. Although the graphic will remain the same, the bricks that are colored in red will change based on the characteristics that will be touched upon in this theme. The characteristics were obtained from a review of literature, stakeholder interviews, and review of existing curricula. We want families to become very acquainted with these characteristics throughout the training. It is important to note that in addition to the characteristics that are highlighted in red, there may be additional characteristics that are touched upon during the theme. Facilitators should try to connect these characteristics to the information they are sharing throughout the training. Remind participants that their **Participant Resource Manual** contains the definitions for these characteristics.

SAY

Before we get into the content let's look at the 14 characteristics of successful foster and adoptive parents. When you took your self-assessment, you were asked about these characteristics.



CHARACTERISTICS FOR SEPARATION, GRIEF AND LOSS



Self-awareness/Self-reflection:

- Parents can identify why they have responded to a child in a certain way.
- Parents can identify what was good, bad, and different about the way they were raised, while adjusting their own parenting to meet a child's needs.
- Parents can identify and forgive themselves for having negative feelings towards a child, moving from disappointment to acceptance.
- Parents are aware of their own history of experiencing loss and being hurt and can identify how this history can negatively impact their parenting if they are not careful.

Empathy and Compassion:

- Parents can perceive/feel others' emotions, particularly others disappointment or sadness.
- Parents can look past the current behavior and find the core distress related to the child's response.
- Parents know they cannot shield the child from pain but must allow the child to experience and express pain and grief.



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SAY

The Separation, Grief, and Loss theme will cover the following characteristics:

- Self-awareness/Self-reflection
- Empathy and Compassion
- Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing

Take a moment to think back to how you assessed yourself with these characteristics. It is important as you start this journey to assess your characteristics as they are qualities that can strengthen your ability to successfully parent a child who is in foster care or has been adopted.



CHARACTERISTICS FOR SEPARATION, GRIEF AND LOSS



Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing:

- Parents can create an emotionally supportive environment that gives the child a safe space to verbalize and process their emotions, including the positive ones.
- Parents know that the child needs a supportive space to share, and a calming guide who will listen and empathize which can include listening more than speaking so that the child finds a solution for their problem.



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ASK

Now that we have reviewed the definitions, why do you think these specific characteristics are important to understanding a child that you may foster or adopt?

Reinforce with Participants:

- Self-awareness/Self-reflection
 - Self-awareness is essential for parents who are fostering or adopting children with a history that involves separation and loss as the child's grief reactions may trigger the parent's own unresolved loss and grief.
- Empathy and Compassion
 - It is not unusual for children to express their feelings of loss and grief in their behavior. They will need you to see that what is behind the behavior are often feelings related to their loss and grief.
 - Children will need your support in processing their feelings of loss and grief.
- Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing
 - Children will need you to create an environment where they feel safe to verbalize and process their feelings of loss and grief. Your ability to be empathetic, emotionally supportive, and nurturing will help create that safe place.



THEME: SEPERATION GRIEF AND LOSS



Guest: Gregory Manning, PsyD
Host: April Dinwoodie



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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Listen to NTDC Podcast Understanding Grief and Loss in Foster and Adoptive Children by Dr. Gregory Manning which can be obtained from the NTDC website or CapLEARN. **For class, end the podcast at the 10:18 time stamp.**

ASK

What did you hear from Dr. Manning about the experience of loss and grief for children in foster care or for those who have been adopted?

PARAPRASE

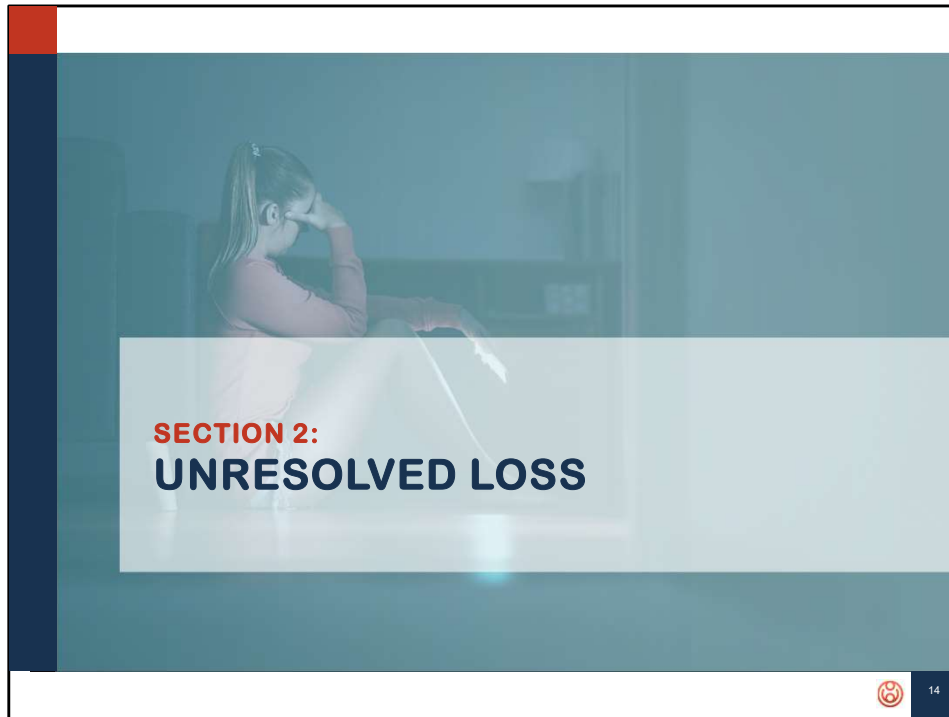
Reinforce the following points that were not covered during the discussion:

- Grief is a normal response to loss.
- Grief can be confusing and scary for children, especially for youth in foster care as they may feel unsafe and unsupported by others.
- Children often display their grief through challenging behaviors.
- Parents who are fostering or adopting play a crucial role in helping the child grieve their losses and begin the healing process.

SAY

If you want to hear more from Dr. Manning, this podcast can be found in the resources for this theme. The last 7 minutes of the podcast not listened to today, gives additional tips on how to help children deal with loss and grief.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Allocate approximately 25 minutes for this section.

SAY

We will now talk about how unresolved separations and ambiguous loss and grief interfere with forming new relationships.

WHAT IS AMBIGUOUS LOSS?

- The person is alive but is not available or is less available to the child.
- The person may not return.
- The relationship may not be the same as it was.



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SAY

The loss experienced by children in foster care or who have been adopted is different from any other losses because it is ambiguous. This means that the loss is not final or certain, like some of the other losses we experience. For instance, the child's parents may be alive, and the child may even see them occasionally, but the relationship has changed. The parent may not be available to the child or may be less available. The child may not be sure if the parent will or will not come back into their lives or if the relationship will ever be the same again. As a result, there is usually no closure, and the loss does not become final.



AMBIGUOUS LOSS AND UNRESOLVED GRIEF

Children who have been separated from their family due to abuse or neglect often:

- Do not have a clear timeline for return.
- Cannot affect the outcome.
- Continue to hope for reconciliation.
- Feel in limbo.

Ambiguous loss also applies to other children who have lost early connections.

- Children who were adopted often wonder about their family.
- Children who were adopted may also not have had opportunities to grieve.



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PARAPHRASE

As you have just heard in Dr. Manning's podcast, when a child is in foster care and separated from their parent/family due to abuse, neglect, or other circumstances, there is often not a clear timeline for return, and the child has no power to affect the outcome. This ambiguity is stressful to the child who often wishes to be reunified with the parent and experiences feelings of being in limbo. It's important to remember that the feelings connected to ambiguous loss also apply to other children whose earliest connections were lost, even children who were adopted as infants or those being raised in kinship families.

Very few adopted children lose their parents to death, and we know that children who were adopted often think and wonder about their parents and family members. They too, naturally wonder about the "what ifs." Too often, these children are not given the opportunity to grieve their losses, as their grief is also not recognized.



HOW DO CHILDREN GRIEVE?

- In spurts, acting fine at times and not at others
- Grief can show up at expected *and* unexpected times
- Grief may look different behaviorally than it does in adults



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PARAPHRASE

Children grieve in spurts and at expected and unexpected times. Grief often looks different in children than in adults. Children's grief is often expressed in their behaviors. Grief is a normal response to loss, and it is not considered pathological. The general expectation is that grief will lessen over time, as the child works through their grief. However, for the child experiencing ambiguous loss, this grief may not be resolved, and it may be ever present and can lead to a variety of physical symptoms and behaviors. Reactions to unresolved grief may appear at unexpected times, such as when a child appears fine one moment, and then displays a burst of aggression, or begins crying for no apparent reason. An unexpected trigger or a trigger unknown to the parent might cause a reaction that seems out of place.

The role of the parent who is fostering or adopting is to look beyond the behavior, to try to figure out what has caused it, and to use the opportunity to talk with the child about their loss and grief.



COMMON SYMPTOMS OF AMBIGUOUS LOSS AND UNRESOLVED GRIEF

- Difficulty with transitions or changes
- Difficulty making decisions or choices, feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty coping with normal childhood or adolescent losses, taking disappointments hard and feeling “stuck”
- Depression and/or anxiety - fearful that they will keep losing people, and they don't feel safe
- Learned helplessness or hopelessness
- Social isolation to protect from loss again
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Anger
- Confusion about what happened and whether they were to blame
- Holding on to unhealthy relationships



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SAY

Some common symptoms of ambiguous loss and unresolved grief are:

- Difficulty with transitions or changes
- Difficulty making decisions or choices, feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty coping with normal childhood or adolescent losses, taking disappointments hard and feeling “stuck”
- Depression and/or anxiety - fearful that they will keep losing people, and they don't feel safe
- Learned helplessness or hopelessness
- Social isolation to protect from loss again
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Anger
- Confusion about what happened and whether they were to blame
- Holding on to unhealthy relationships



TRAUMA AND ATTACHMENT ISSUES

The child may:

- Feel responsible for the separation.
- Worry about the family's well-being.
- Hope to be reunited.

Ambivalence and unresolved grief may:

- Prevent grieving for lost family.
- Interfere with forming and adjusting to new relationships.
- Be expressed in concerning behaviors.



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PARAPHRASE

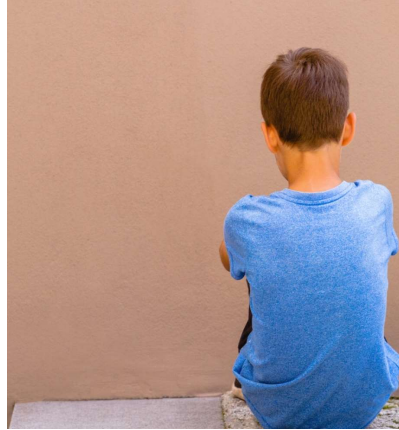
There may also be trauma and attachment issues that add to the child's situation. The child may feel responsible for the loss, or they may worry about the parent's or a sibling's well-being. When the child holds out hope of being reunited, they cannot grieve the loss because the loss is not fully recognized and/or final. The unresolved grief can interfere with the child forming and adjusting to new relationships. This can make the child's time in foster care difficult for everyone - the family, the child, and the caregiver - since the child is not emotionally free to settle into a new family while they are holding out hope of returning to their parent(s). It is important to remember that children express their loss and grief behaviorally and this can be misinterpreted by others as the child being "bad" or misbehaving.



SURVIVAL MODE

Children in foster care may be in “survival mode”:

- Hoping to return home.
- Unable to fully acknowledge loss, so unable to begin to grieve.
- Behaviors may be intended to build emotional distance or separation from the foster family.



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PARAPHRASE

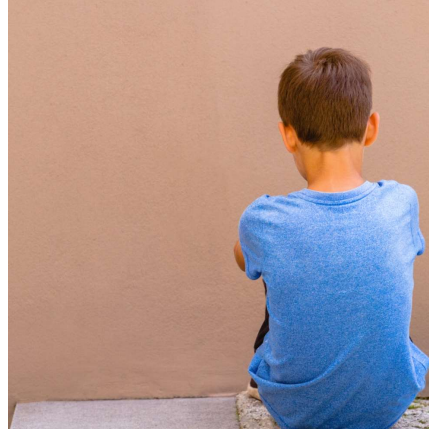
Children in foster care are often in survival mode with the hope that they will return home at the forefront of their thinking. Because they cannot fully acknowledge the loss they are experiencing, they cannot begin to grieve. They may exhibit behaviors that are intended to distance themselves from their foster/kinship family, or even antagonize them in the hope that they will be asked to leave and have nowhere to go but home. For example, the child may say things like, “I hate you”, “you are not my real parent”, “I wished I never moved into your home”.



SURVIVAL MODE

Children moving to adoption must face the reality that they will not return “home” - but will still think about family.

Help children recognize the loss and begin grieving.



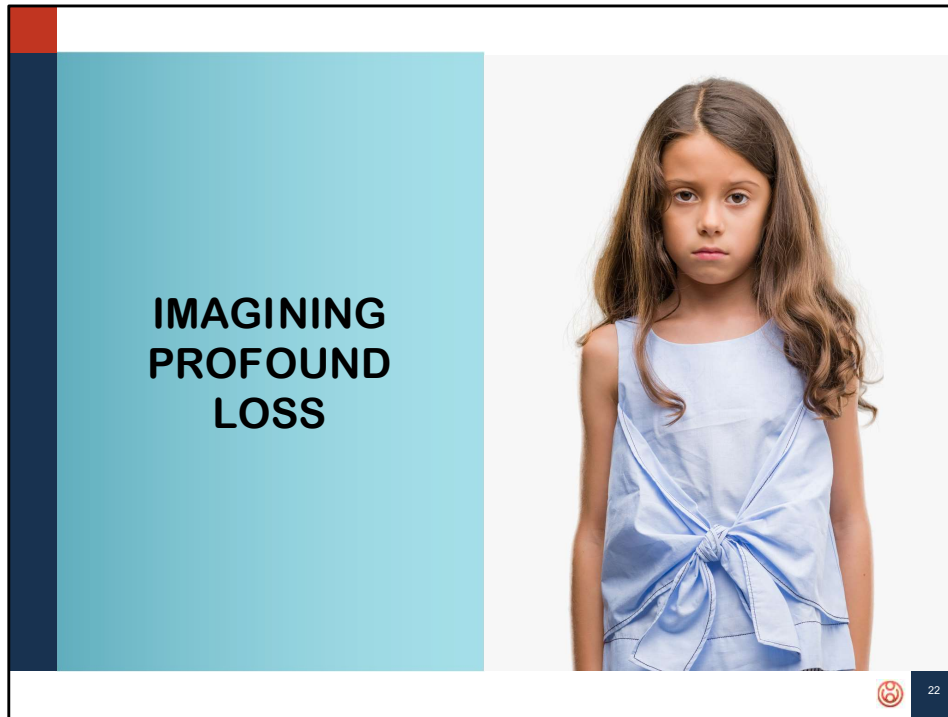
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PARAPHRASE

Once a decision is made for the child to move from foster care to adoption, the child must also face the reality that the hope of return to the parent(s) is dashed, adding to the child's loss. This does not mean that the child will stop thinking or grieving the loss of the parent or family. The family will continue to be present psychologically for that child, even if not physically present.

If the parent is still alive, there is always the possibility that a reunion will take place in the future. This is especially true for older children who may plan to reunify once they are 18. Therefore, the loss is not final, and the hope remains. The child must be helped to recognize the loss and begin the grieving process. It may also be helpful to validate that it is ok for the child to love and care about many people in their lives. New relationships don't mean that old relationships are, or were not, important.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

In this activity you will engage participants in a guided imagery regarding loss. You will present the next four slides, giving participants time to write their responses after each slide, and then facilitate a discussion.

SAY

Now, let's give you the opportunity to imagine what it is like for a child to sustain such profound losses. Before we start, take out a blank page, and be ready to write.

Adaptation for Remote Platform: This activity can easily be done via remote platform as it is written. After the activity has been completed and discussion begins, stop sharing the PPT, so that the class can see each other in gallery view.


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

It is possible that some participants will refuse to complete the activity and will not follow the last step of removing three more items or people from their list. If this occurs, use it as part of your discussion at the end of the exercise, illustrating how difficult it is for children who have no say in who in what they take or leave behind each time they are moved. Explore their feelings about refusing to complete the exercise and ask how they think a child feels when they have no choice to refuse to move and leave so much behind.



IMAGINING PROFOUND LOSS

- You are moving away and will not return.
- What ten singular things or people would you pack?



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SAY

Imagine you are moving away and that you will never return. The moving truck is outside. You only have a few minutes to pack ten singular items or people to take with you.

Make a list of the ten singular things or people you will take with you. You have about 2 minutes to make the list.

DO

- At 2 minutes, go to the next slide.



SAY

Now you find out that the truck is smaller than you thought. You can only take five items or people. Remove five items or people from your list. You will have about 1 minute.

DO

- At 1 minute, go to the next slide.



IMAGINING PROFOUND LOSS

- The truck is even smaller than you thought.
- Remove three more things or people from your list.


 25

SAY

Now you find out that the truck is even smaller than you thought. You can only take two items or people. Remove three more items or people from your list. You will have about 1 minute.

DO

- At 1 minute, go to the next slide.



IMAGINING PROFOUND LOSS

The truck will take you to a different community to live with strangers.

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SAY

You have just learned that the truck will now take you to a community that is not of your race or culture, and you will be living with people you do not know anything about.

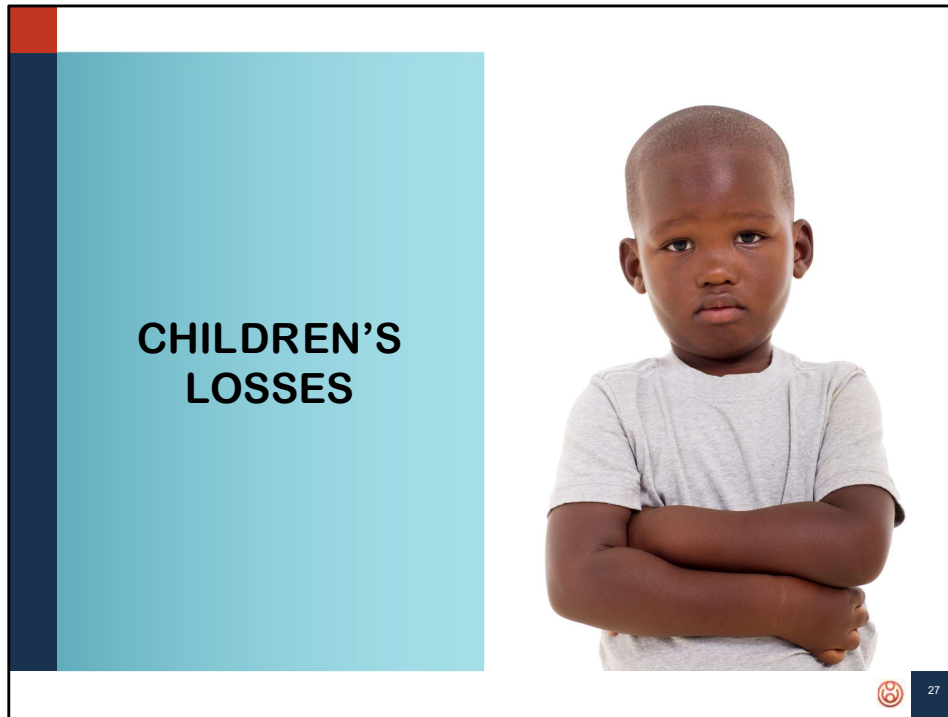
DO

- Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:
 - How did you feel when you had to start removing things from the truck?
 - Who or what did you not want to let go of? Why?
 - Who or what did you keep at the end? Why?
 - What did you learn that would help you understand the loss, grief, and separation experienced by children impacted by foster care, adoption, or guardianship?

SAY

For many of you, you kept a person - a father, mother, spouse, son, or daughter. That is what children lose when they move into foster care or adoption. It is important to remember that children in these situations are not able to choose parents, family members or pets- they lose what may be most important to them.

As human beings, we all experience loss and grief. It is likely that you will be emotionally touched by the many losses of children that you may foster or adopt. It is not unusual for the child's losses to bring up some of your own issues with loss and grief. You will need to have good **self-awareness** (characteristic) regarding the impact that these losses may have on you so you can be sure it does not strongly interfere with your ability to respond to the child's needs. Your own self-care will be important.



FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This is a full-group flipchart activity. Facilitate a discussion where participants call out children's losses while you write them on a flipchart.

Adaptation for Remote Platform: Instead of a flipchart you can either add a new blank slide and use Zoom annotate feature (text) to reflect participant responses OR you can use the white board feature. If not using Zoom, you can use Jamboard like a whiteboard. You need a Google account to access Jamboard. (Sign into your google account and then do a search for Jamboard.)

Allow 10 minutes for the entire activity.

SAY

Now let's think about the losses for the child who has been adopted or who is in foster or kinship care that may impact the child's sense of security, belonging, and emotions.

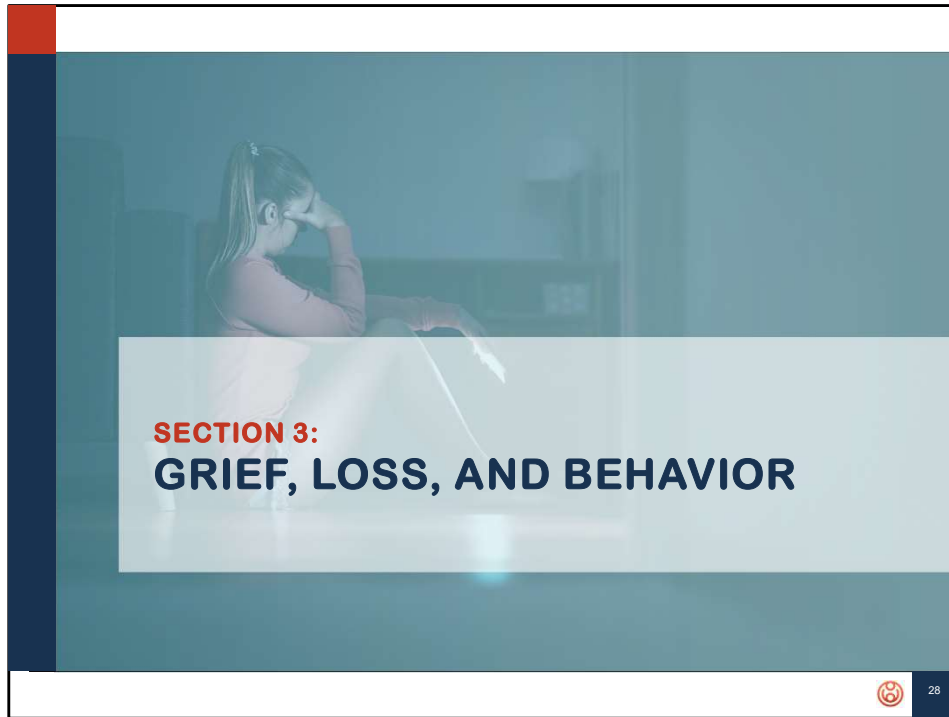
DO

- Ask the group to call out losses that children in foster care, kinship care, and adoption may have experienced and record the losses on a flipchart.
- Make sure the following losses are included in the list:
 - Parents
 - Siblings
 - Extended family
 - Friends and pets

- Belongings, familiar environments, foods, way of life
- Favorite items, toys, clothing
- Celebrations and cultural events
- Former caregivers and supports, especially if they have to change schools and neighborhoods
- Status within their family, school, friends
- Connection to racial, cultural, ethnic community
- Access to their personal history, including birth and medical information, school records, and records of other milestones
- Birth order
- Genetic connection
- Privacy
- Self/Identity, such as their name
- Change of pre-existing relationships/roles (i.e., grandmother becomes mom, cousins become siblings) for children living with kinship caregivers

SAY

It is important for us to remember the depth of the losses that many children experience at such young ages. Children don't have the years of experience to manage these losses. Our role is to help them grieve and manage the losses. One way to lessen the impact of loss is to find ways to maintain connections for children with people and communities that are important to them. The importance of these connections and how to help the child maintain them is addressed more fully in other themes.



FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take 25 minutes.

SAY

A child's grief and loss is often expressed in their behavior.

FOSTER: GRIEF AND LOSS IN CHILDREN



This video includes a clip of the documentary *FOSTER*.
Foster footage courtesy of Participant Media, LLC. © 2018
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29

PARAPHRASE

We are now going to watch a video clip taken from a 2018 documentary named *FOSTER*, written and directed by Deborah Oppenheimer and Mark Jonathan Harris. It was filmed in Los Angeles County about the child welfare system and the true stories of people in it. The behavior of children who are grieving their losses is often misunderstood by adults and even the children themselves. In this clip you'll meet a child named Sydney describing her reactions and behaviors after multiple moves. You will also hear from Mrs. Beavers, who has been fostering her. As you watch, listen to how Mrs. Beavers recognizes the losses and think about how her understanding helps the child.

DO

Show the video clip which can be found on the NTDC website or CapLEARN. (The clip is a little over one minute long.)

ASK

- What do you imagine are some of the losses that Sydney might have experienced?
- How did Sydney show her grief before moving into her current foster home?
- Given how Mrs. Beavers describes children's losses, what do you think she may be doing or saying that has supported Sydney in her healing?

SAY

There are many ways children can react to grief and loss. Let's discuss some of the ways that grief and loss might be present.



GRIEF AND LOSS IN CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

Common Grieving Behaviors

- Depression
- Disturbances in eating habits and sleep patterns
- Running away
- Self-medicating
- Self-harming behaviors (cutting, hair pulling, skin picking)
- Angry outbursts
- Anxiety
- Unhealthy relationships and/or intimacy difficulties
- Confusion and misunderstanding of their own history
- Self-blame
- Need to search for something that feels missing (teens/adults)
- Social withdrawal



30

SAY

Children who are grieving are often overwhelmed by feelings they cannot express verbally but are communicating through their behavior. For instance, you might see any of the behaviors listed on the slide.

DO

Briefly read the behaviors listed on the slide.



TALKING ABOUT GRIEF



31

SAY

For some children, talking about their losses and grief is so painful that they are afraid if they revisit the loss again, they will be so sad that they may never emerge from their despair. Working with a mental health professional to support the grief process is a good way to help children feel safe and supported and to help them more safely revisit losses and begin to manage their grief.



KEY FACTORS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS

- The child's developmental level
- The significance of the people the child is separated from
- Whether the separation is temporary or permanent
- How the loss was communicated to the child
- The degree of familiarity of the new surroundings



32

PARAPHRASE

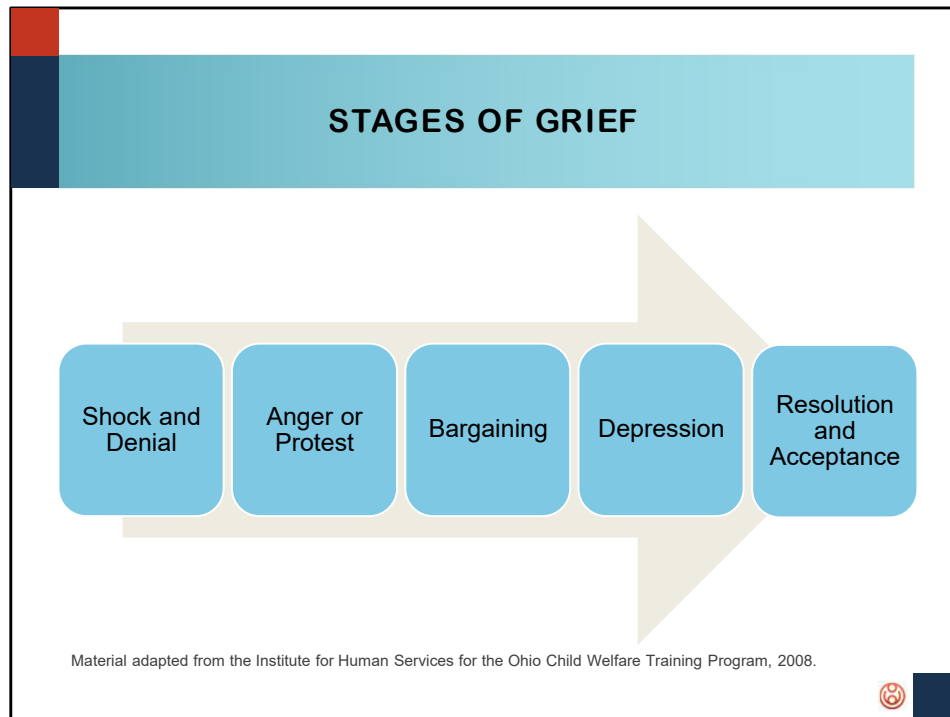
It is important that we understand that the impact of the loss will change over time and will be processed differently through different developmental stages. Awareness of the loss changes over time, so that at each developmental stage the child reconsiders what has been lost, and the grieving process continues. Grief and loss need to be honored and addressed many times over the life course. It is not one and done.

The age of the child at the time of the loss has some bearing on the way the child will grieve. Children revisit grief differently depending on their developmental stage and as their understanding and thinking about the loss changes. A child who experiences the loss of a parent as an infant or toddler will revisit that loss many times over, as their cognitive abilities develop, and their understanding of the loss deepens with age. It's also not unusual for feelings connected with loss to be intensely felt during the teen years as the teen works toward their own identity development and new questions and thoughts emerge.

For children placed at an older age, it is important to understand the quality of relationships with parents and other important people in their life will be an important factor in the child's feelings and adjustment.

The five key factors shown on the slide are essential in understanding how a child experiences loss: 1) The child's developmental level 2) The significance of the people the child is separated from 3) Whether the separation is temporary or permanent 4) How the loss was communicated to the child 5) The degree of familiarity of the new surroundings





PARAPHRASE

In addition to understanding how children view loss and deal with grief at different developmental stages, we should review the stages of grief that can be expected, not necessarily in order. Children can feel lots of different ways such as sad, angry, confused, and guilty all at the same time. Children grieve because they miss the people who are lost to them, regardless of the circumstances. Let's take a moment and remember how the exercise earlier felt – not being able to take with you the people, places, and things that meant so much to you.

There are two handouts in your **Participant Resource Manual** that discuss children's grief in more detail:

- Handout #1: Developmental Stages of Grief – This handout can help you understand what a child may be thinking at different developmental stages and what behaviors you might see that show that grieving is taking place.
- Handout #2: Theories of the Stages of Grief in Foster Care and Adoption- This handout can help to define the journey a child might take in coping with grief and the behaviors you might see in each stage. These are resources you can refer to when children are in your home.

DO

Have participants refer to Handout #1 and Handout #2 in their **Participant Resource Manual**.

SEPARATION, GRIEF AND LOSS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



34

SAY

Now, let's watch this video, as Debbie Riley, LCMFT and CEO of the Center for Adoption Support and Education, who is an adoption expert and adoptive parent. In the video, she talks about grief and loss in children and adolescents. Then we will discuss the key points she is raising.

DO

- Show the video which can be found on the NTDC website or CapLEARN. (Approximately 7 and a half minutes.)
- Facilitate a discussion of key points from the video. Bring up the following points if not mentioned:
 - The loss of a parent, even if the child was never raised by them, is a real and profound loss.
 - Separation from siblings is a profound loss, even if visitation occurs, but more so if there is no visitation.
 - It takes time and support to work through grief and loss.
 - Triggers can be predictable and unpredictable in daily life.
 - We don't always recognize the grief responses of children, but grief must be addressed in a supportive way. Sometimes, this will require assistance from a mental health professional.
 - Patience and being able to listen to the child and validate their feelings is an important part of supporting the grief process.
 - Finding forms of connection to loved ones supports the grieving process and allows for healing.



**BREAK
10 MINUTES**



 35

FACILITATOR'S NOTE
Allow for a 10-minute break.



FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Allow 20 minutes for this section.

SAY

We've talked about grief and loss and how they may be expressed in a child's behavior. Now, let's discuss ways to address grief and loss.

ADDRESSING GRIEF AND LOSS WITH EMPATHY

- Be willing to have difficult conversations about loss and grief.
- Be willing to initiate the conversations.
- Help the child tell 'their' story through Life Books or other means.
- Be aware of your own grief history and possible triggers.



37

PARAPHRASE

As parents, you must be willing to have difficult conversations with children about grief and loss. You must be willing to start these conversations. Children may be reluctant to talk because it's painful and perhaps because they have not made the connections between what they are feeling and the losses they experienced.

Part of the healing will occur through relationships, as feelings of trust and safety are established. Children may also feel disconnected from their experiences and having conversations about their stories can help to open the door to their connecting to their losses and talking about their sadness. If the child has a Life Book, this can be helpful tool to assist the child in thinking and talking about their story. We'll talk more about tips like this in a moment.

It is also important that you are aware of your own grief history and how you might be triggered by discussions about loss and grief with a child you are fostering or adopting. Supporting children in their sadness and pain can raise feelings from your own experiences, even if you thought those were resolved. Your ability to be **empathetic and compassionate** without becoming caught up in the child or family's pain will enable you to provide the most **emotionally supportive and nurturing** environment for their expression of grief (characteristics). Being aware of your own loss and grief history can help you understand where you might have triggers. If you find that you are struggling with your own grief and loss, it may be helpful seek professional support.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

Help the child identify what was lost.

Discuss loss and ambiguity.

Redefine family.

Give permission to grieve.

Use the Life Book



38

DO

Have participants refer to the [Handout #3: Ambiguous Loss Haunts Foster and Adopted Children](#) in their **Participant Resource Manual**. This article is from Adoptalk from the North American Council on Adoptable Children. (The following slides will address each of the following tips.)

SAY

We will talk about some tips for helping children deal with loss which is further expanded upon in the Adoptalk article.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

Help the child identify what was lost.

Discuss loss and ambiguity.

Redefine family.

Give permission to grieve.

Use the Life Book.

- Remember the list we just made of losses for the child.
- When possible, incorporate celebrations, rituals, food, and other cultural elements into your family life.



39

DO

Read or paraphrase the tips on the screen.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

Help the child identify what was lost.

Discuss loss and ambiguity.

Redefine family.

Give permission to grieve.

Use the Life Book.

- Speak about the ambiguity and acknowledge the loss.
- Let the child know that what they are feeling is normal. Share an experience of your loss.



40

DO

Read or paraphrase the tips on the screen.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

Help the child identify what was lost.

Discuss loss and ambiguity.

Redefine family.

Give permission to grieve.

Use the Life Book.

- Redefine what makes up a family.
- Allow for openness to family members and to other important relationships in the child's life.



41

DO

Read or paraphrase the tips on the screen. What we mean by 'redefine family' is being open to new family definitions of who is included in your family- it could include siblings in a different home, aunts, uncles, the child's parents etc.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

Help the child identify what was lost.

Discuss loss and ambiguity.

Redefine family.

Give permission to grieve.

Use the Life Book.

- Give the child permission to grieve the loss of family without guilt.
- Give the child tools to express grief and opportunities to talk about it.
- Help the child learn to use drawing, journaling, working with clay, vigorous exercise or sports, and safe ways to vent feelings.
- Make time to join the child in these activities.



42

DO

Read or paraphrase the tips on the screen.



LIFE BOOKS AND MEMORY BOXES: TOOLS FOR ADDRESSING GRIEF AND LOSS



43

PARAPHRASE

Let's talk more about some tools that can be helpful in addressing grief and loss with children- the Life Book and Memory Box. The Life Book is one that is commonly used by caseworkers and therapists to help children tell their stories and to make sure they have a clear picture of what has happened to them.

Another tool is a Memory Box. A child can keep photos, letters, and other items that are important to them so that they can be preserved and revisited. The child can choose a box, perhaps a shoe box or other box that they can decorate by painting, writing, drawing, or gluing photos or other decorations on it to personalize it.

It is possible that a child will have a Life Book or Memory Box that they bring with them. They may even be working on a Life Book now with their caseworker or therapist. You can use this tool to open conversations with them about their history and losses, as well as some of the things they feel happy or proud of. You can be helpful by offering new photos or memorabilia to the Life Book or Memory Box that the child wants to add. In this way, you become part of their story. If the child does not have a Life Book or Memory Box, you may want to help the child begin one. If the child has a caseworker or therapist, check in with them for any helpful tips.



USING TOOLS TO HELP CHILDREN ADDRESS LOSS AND GRIEF

These tools, along with conversations in the home, can:

- Open communication about history and important memories and honor them.
- Help to reconstruct child's story and to correct misconceptions while building trust.
- Open communication about important people in the child's life as a way to honor them and their importance in the child's life.



44

PARAPHRASE

How do Life Books and tools like these help children address their grief? Here are some key takeaways from using tools like these and having conversations with children in their home:

- Opens communication about history and important memories and honors them.
- Helps to reconstruct the child's story and to correct misconceptions while building trust.
- Opens communication about important people in the child's life to value them and their importance.
- If the child does not have a Life Book, ask the caseworker or therapist (if they have one) to work on one of these projects with you and the child together.



TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN ADDRESS LOSS AND GRIEF

Display pictures of people, places and things that are important to the child

Be conscious of how special occasions can trigger intense feelings of loss

Keep your expectations realistic

Model healthy responses to loss



45

Note: Kinship Caregiver Addendum material (**Facilitator's Note**) is available for this page.

PARAPHRASE

- Display pictures of people, places and things that are important to the child. For families who have adopted, their family trees have been permanently changed. There are good examples of adoption friendly “family trees” that can be found on-line to include all members of the child’s family.
- Be conscious of how special occasions can trigger intense feelings of loss. Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day can all bring up difficult or confusing feelings for the child. Some may bring back traumatic memories, and others may bring melancholy and sadness. Taking steps like adding an extra candle on the birthday cake to commemorate the family, or making a point of saying, “I’ll bet your parents are thinking about you today” shows that you are aware that the child may be thinking of others who may not be there with them for these special days and that you can support the child in recognizing them.
- Be aware of anniversary reactions, especially on days or during seasons when known traumatic events occurred (e.g., child’s removal from the home).
- Keep your expectations realistic. There is no set time frame for grieving losses. Help the child understand that feelings of grief will come and go in different ways over time, and that you will always be a safe person to talk and express feelings with. Understand that we should not expect the child’s feelings for those they care about and lost to just disappear. They will be a part of the child’s life into adulthood.
- Model healthy responses to loss. If you suffer a loss, share your feelings openly; let children see you mourn so they can learn how you express sadness and anger about loss



in a healthy way. It is especially helpful for boys to see grown men express their grief openly, giving them permission to openly express their feelings, too.

- Patience and the ability to sit with a child in their grief and to be supportive over time will help to build your relationship and allow the child to continue to process their grief.



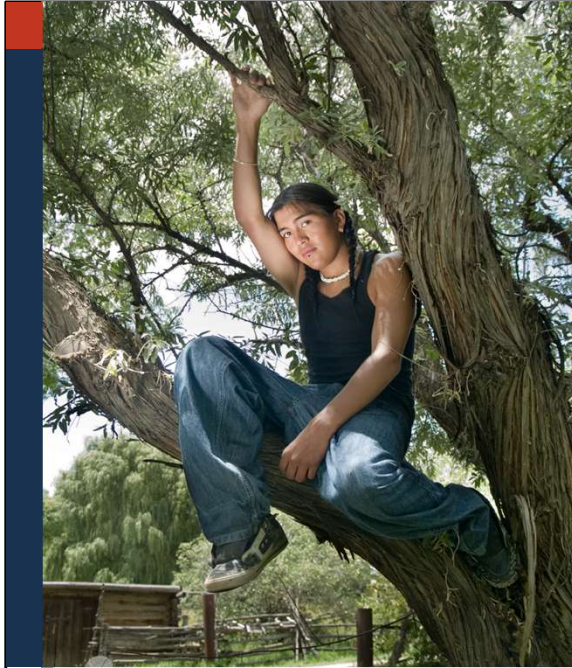


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take approximately 15 minutes.

SAY

In this section, we'll work on building your skills to address a child's grief and loss.



CASE STUDY: DARREN

- 13-year-old boy
- Placed with his grandparents at birth
- In foster care since he was 9 years old because his grandparents were unable to care for him.



47

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

In this activity, participants will use the Darren case study to practice recognizing the underlying cause of the behaviors that may result from grief and loss. Participants should read the case study on their own and then circle the behaviors related to grief/loss on the handout.

Note: Kinship Caregiver Addendum material is available for this page, including an adapted case study handout.

Adaptation for Remote Platform: After the case study is read, the Facilitator will stop sharing the PPT and move into galley view. The facilitator will read the possible signs aloud and ask participants to respond with a thumbs up (means yes) or down (means no) as they decide if what is said is a possible sign or grief and loss.

Allow 10 minutes for the activity.

SAY

We'll work with a case study for this activity. The case centers on Darren, a 13-year-old boy who was placed first with his grandparents and then entered foster care at age 9 when they could no longer care for him. The case study includes a list of signs and behaviors that could be related to Darren's loss.



Please read the case study and circle all the behaviors on the list that could be related to Darren's grief and loss issues. You will find this case study in your **Participant Resource Manual** under Handout #4. (If you have kinship caregivers in the room, you can use Handout #5).

You'll have about 5 minutes.

DO

- Have participants refer to the Handout #4: Case Study: Addressing Darren's Grief in their **Participant Resource Manual**.
- At 5 minutes (or sooner if everybody finishes before 5 minutes), ask participants to stop.
- Read the signs below and have volunteers raise their hands (or use thumbs-up if using a remote platform).

POSSIBLE SIGNS THAT DARREN IS DEALING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS ISSUES (all items bolded below can be signs of grief and loss):

- a) He is quiet and withdrawn much of the time.**
- b) He does not want to talk about Mama and Pop.**
- c) He likes watching TV.
- d) He gets into fights with other children when he feels slighted.**
- e) He is good at sports.
- f) He "daydreams" in class, has difficulty finishing projects and hands in homework late.**
- g) He has not been told anything about his parents or other family members.
- h) He has trouble sleeping.**
- i) He is intelligent and does well academically.
- j) Darren has a couple of friends outside of sports.
- k) He is anxious in social situations and does not answer questions about himself.**



REFLECTION/ RELEVANCE



48

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

If time permits do this reflection in class. If time is short, ask participants to do on their own at home. This activity should take approximately 5 minutes.

SAY

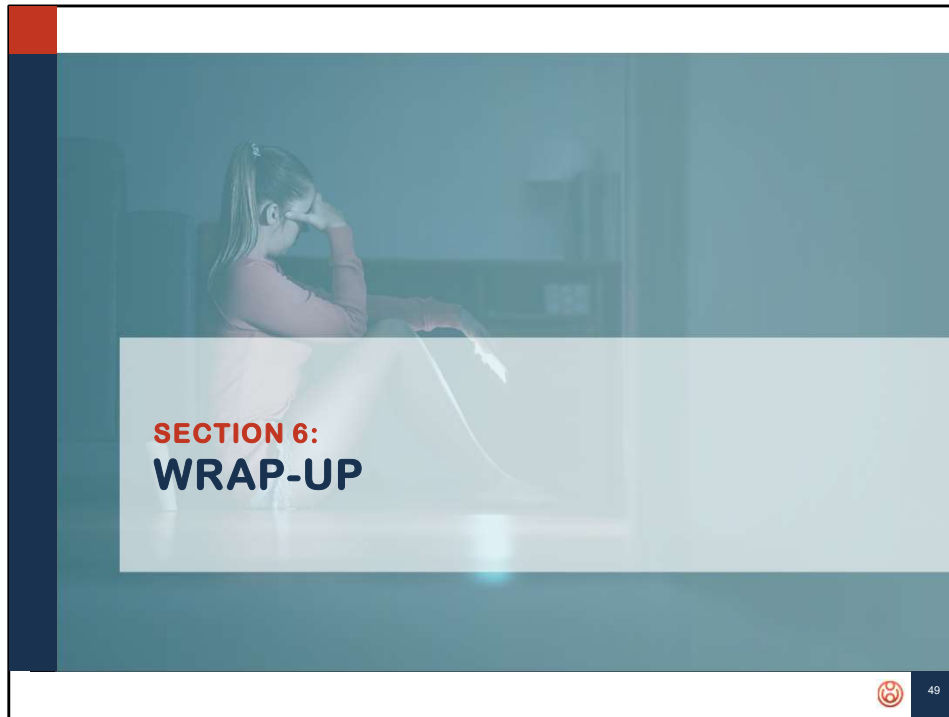
Now, let's take a few minutes to reflect on what you've learned in this theme and how you can apply it to yourself.

Now please open your **Participant Resource Manual** to this theme. Think back to a personal loss. Be aware that dealing with our own losses may be triggering, so remember to do what you need to do to take care of yourself.

Now that you have thought about a personal loss, can you imagine how supporting a child's loss might stir up feelings in you?

What are some ideas for how you will practice good self-care to help you deal with these feelings?





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Allow 5 minutes for the wrap-up.

SAY

Now, it's time to wrap up. Before we do, I want to briefly highlight the key points from this theme:

- Children in the foster care system are likely to experience unresolved grief and ambiguous loss.
- Children who have been adopted may also experience grief and loss, even children who were adopted at a young age.
- Grief work takes time and patience.
- Grieving may change as the child progresses through different developmental stages.
- Grief and loss are often the underlying causes of behavioral concerns.
- Grief is normal and should not be pathologized.
- Parents can help to lessen grief and loss by honoring the child's grief and loss, and by using tools and skills to help the child communicate and understand their loss and grief.

LIFELONG LEARNING



50

SAY

It is critical that as you go through this journey, you continue to enhance your knowledge and skills. It is important that you continue your own learning by taking advantage of resources that are available to you. This theme has numerous resources that will help you continue to learn more about this topic. For example, there is additional content in the NTDC Podcast, *Understanding Grief and Loss in Foster and Adoptive Children* by Dr. Gregory Manning. We listened to some of the podcast in this class, but Dr. Manning has more to say about how those who foster or adopt can support children in their grief and loss.

You can find the resources on the NTDC website or in CapLEARN.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The closing quote above and the paraphrase section below will be done only once per day, after the last theme presented for the day. If you are moving on to another theme invite them to take a break, stretch, or breathe, before moving on to the next theme.

If closing for the day:

- Thank everyone for attending and for their thoughtful participation and attention. Remind the participants that although this training may seem long, it is critical for them to gather the knowledge, attitude, and skills that are needed as they embark on this journey because they ultimately will play a huge role in the lives of children and families.
- If in person, collect the name tents or have them tuck them into their **Participant Resource Manual** to bring back to the next class.

PARAPHRASE

Close out the day by covering the below topics:

- Remind participants of the date/time for the next class and let participants know if there are any changes to the location.
- Encourage participants to contact you (or other facilitators) if they have any questions or concerns.
- Review the themes that will be covered during the next class.
- If in person, remind participants to take their **Participant Resource Manual** with them and to bring them to the next session. If using a remote platform, remind participants to

have the **Participant Resource Manual** available for the next class.





For more information, visit:
ntdcportal.org

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**National Training and
Development Curriculum**
FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



ADDENDUM: INCLUSION MATERIALS FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

54



ADDENDUM FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

There is addendum material for this theme for kinship caregivers.



55

Section 4: Addressing Grief and Loss

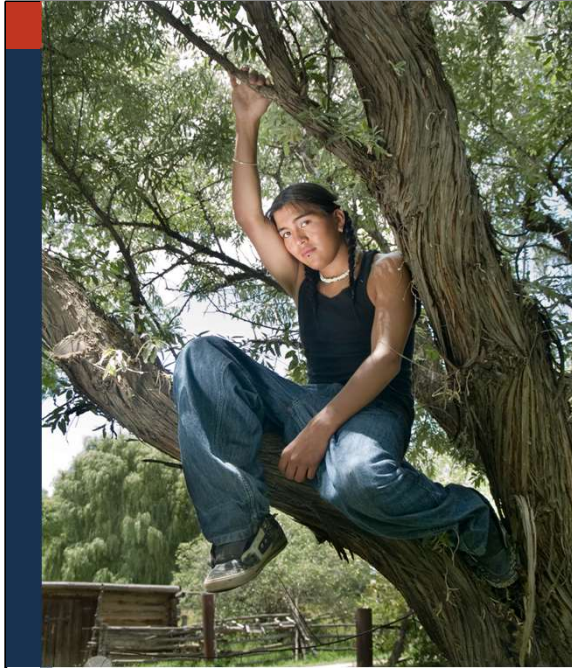
- On slide 45, include the following **Facilitator's Note**:

Kinship families have unique experiences with grief and loss. The caregiver may also be experiencing grief and loss as they deal with the circumstances going on in the life of one or both birth parents or the loss of one of the parents. This will be complicated by their commitment to the family member's child they are caring for. Some of the "takeaways" will be experienced differently for kinship caregivers. For example, a grandparent may not want to change the family tree when they adopt their grandchild. This activity may also bring up the reality that the child's parent is now legally their sibling, yet the actual relationships are not those of a sibling, but that of a parent and child. The facilitator may want to acknowledge this if there are kinship caregivers in the class and say that it is normal for an activity like doing a family tree to bring up grief and loss for both the caregiver and the child. Encourage kinship caregivers to think about how they will respond to some of these situations that trigger their own loss issues. When children experience what is called "divided loyalties" and feel protective of their parents and their kinship caregiver, they may try to guard their feelings of grief and loss around the caregiver to not hurt their feelings or make them feel bad. Addressing one's own areas of grief and loss and getting support to address them may help them feel more prepared to acknowledge and support the child's grief and loss experiences.

Section 5: Skill Building

- Instead of using slide 47 (case_study with Darren) use the slide that follows this slide. Please note that the Handout #5 for this case study has also been adapted to be reflective of kinship caregivers.





CASE STUDY: DARREN

- 13-year-old boy
- Placed with his grandparents at birth
- In foster care since he was 9 years old because his grandmother passed away and his grandfather was not able to care for him.



56

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

In this activity, participants will use the Darren case study to practice recognizing the underlying cause of the behaviors that may result from grief and loss. Participants will read the case study on their own and then circle behaviors related to grief/loss on the handout.

Allow 10 minutes for the activity.

SAY

We'll work with a case study for this activity. The case centers on Darren, a 13-year-old boy who was placed initially with his grandparents and then entered foster care at age 9 when his grandmother passed away and his grandfather was not able to care for him.

Please read the case study and circle all the behaviors on the list that could be related to Darren's grief and loss issues. You will find this case study in your **Participant Resource Manual** under Handout #5.

You'll have about 5 minutes.

DO



- Have participants refer to the Handout #5: Case Study: Addressing Darren’s Grief (for Kinship Caregivers) in their **Participant Resource Manual**.
- At 5 minutes (or sooner if everybody finishes before 5 minutes), ask participants to stop.
- Read the signs below and have volunteers raise their hands (if virtual, they can use the thumbs-up).

POSSIBLE SIGNS THAT DARREN IS DEALING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS ISSUES (all items bolded below can be signs of grief and loss):

- a) He is quiet and withdrawn much of the time.**
- b) He does not want to talk about Mama and Pop.**
- c) He likes watching TV.
- d) He gets into fights with other children when he feels slighted.**
- e) He is good at sports.
- f) He “daydreams” in class, has difficulty finishing projects and hands in homework late.**
- g) He was not given accurate information about his birth parents and other family members when he came into foster care.
- h) He has trouble sleeping.**
- i) He is intelligent and does well academically.
- j) Darren has a couple of friends outside of sports.
- k) He is anxious in social situations and does not answer questions about himself.**

