

Sharing Their Stories: Experiences of Grief & Ambiguous Loss among Children of Incarcerated Parents

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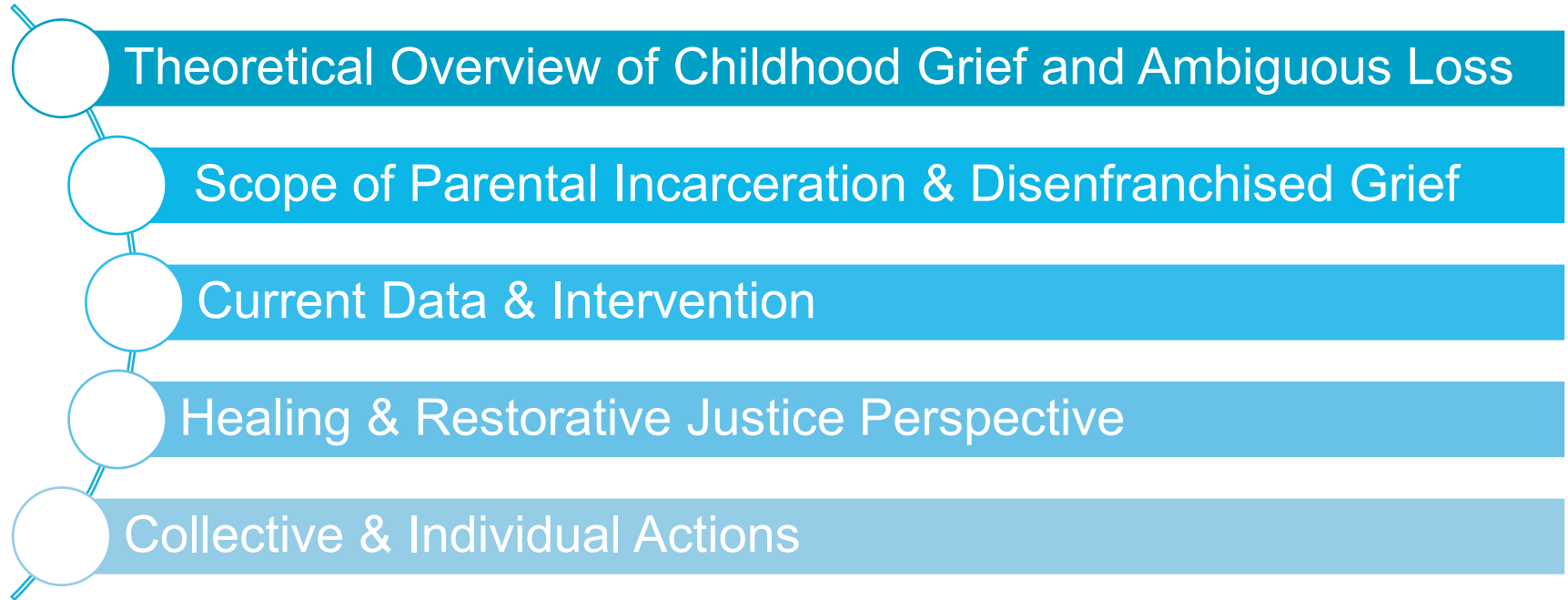
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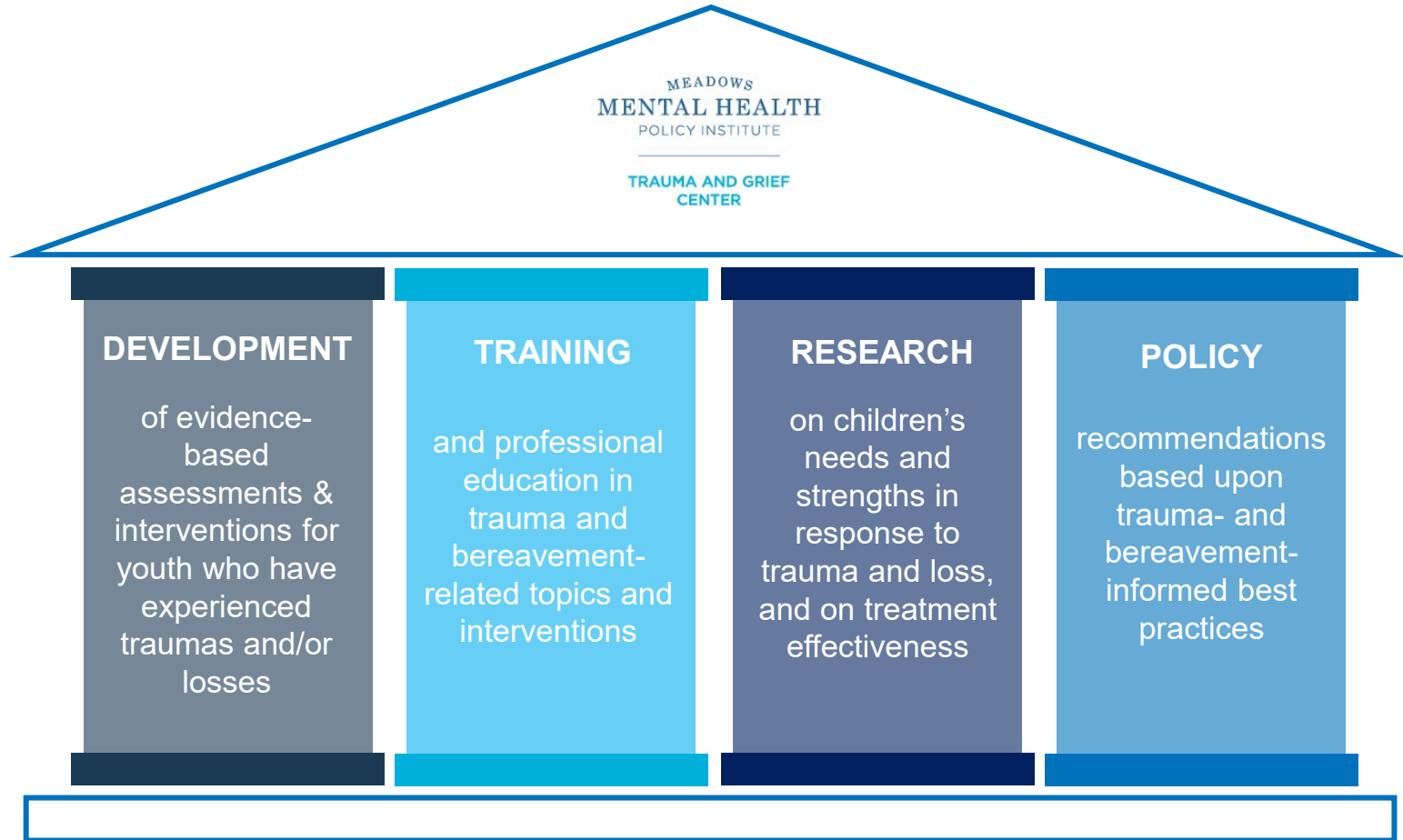
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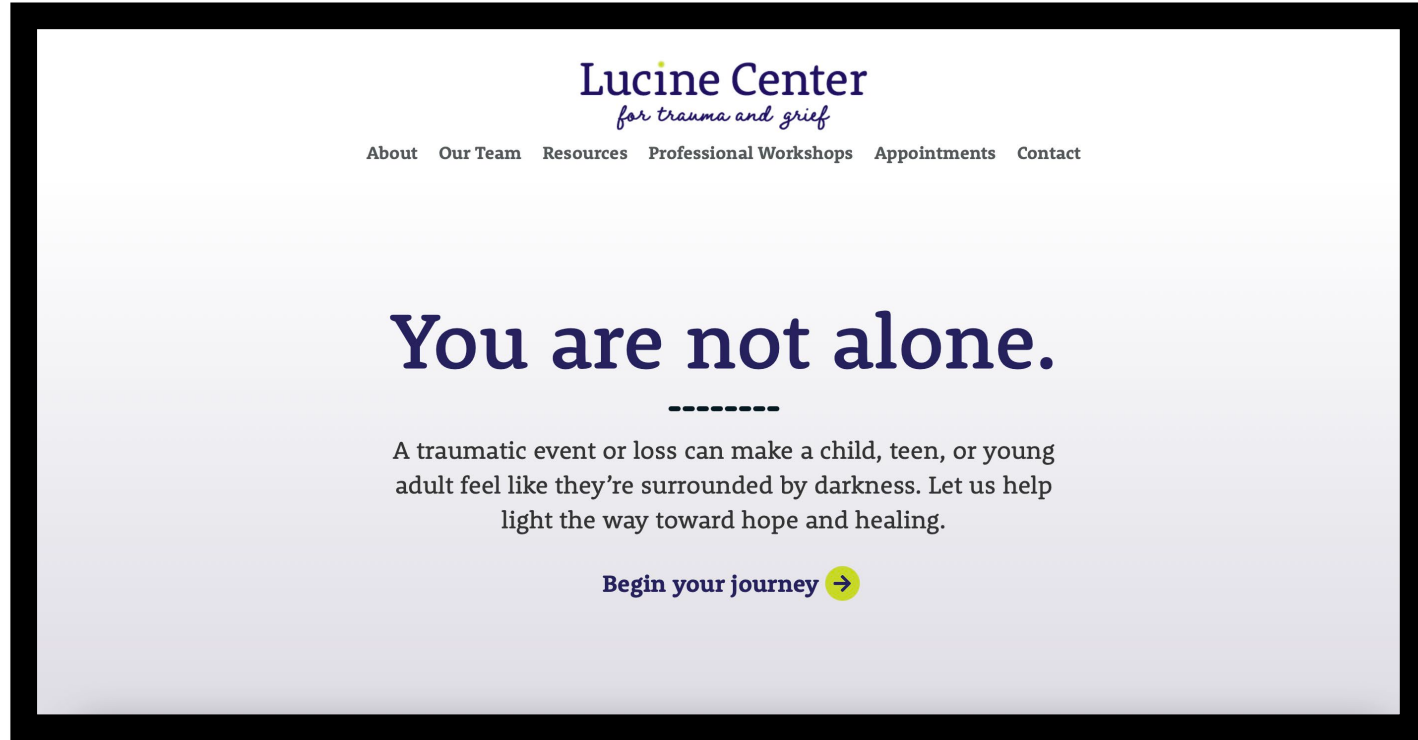
Overview of Presentation



Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center



Lucine Center for Trauma and Grief



<http://lucinecenter.com>

Overview of Childhood Grief and Ambiguous Loss

Bereavement

experience of deprivation or loss by death

Grief

psychological or behavioral **response** arising from bereavement



**Children's grief reactions
(not simply bereavement) play an important role in
future psychological functioning**

Ambiguous Loss

(Boss, 1999)

Ambiguous loss differs from ordinary loss

- No verification of death (e.g., person is missing)
- No certainty that the person will come back
- No guarantee things will return to the way they used to be

Examples of ambiguous loss:

- Parental incarceration
- Deportation
- Deployment
- Kidnapping



Children can experience grief reactions in response to ambiguous loss.



Multidimensional Grief Theory

Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos (2011)

Separation Distress

Existential / Identity Distress

Circumstance-Related Distress

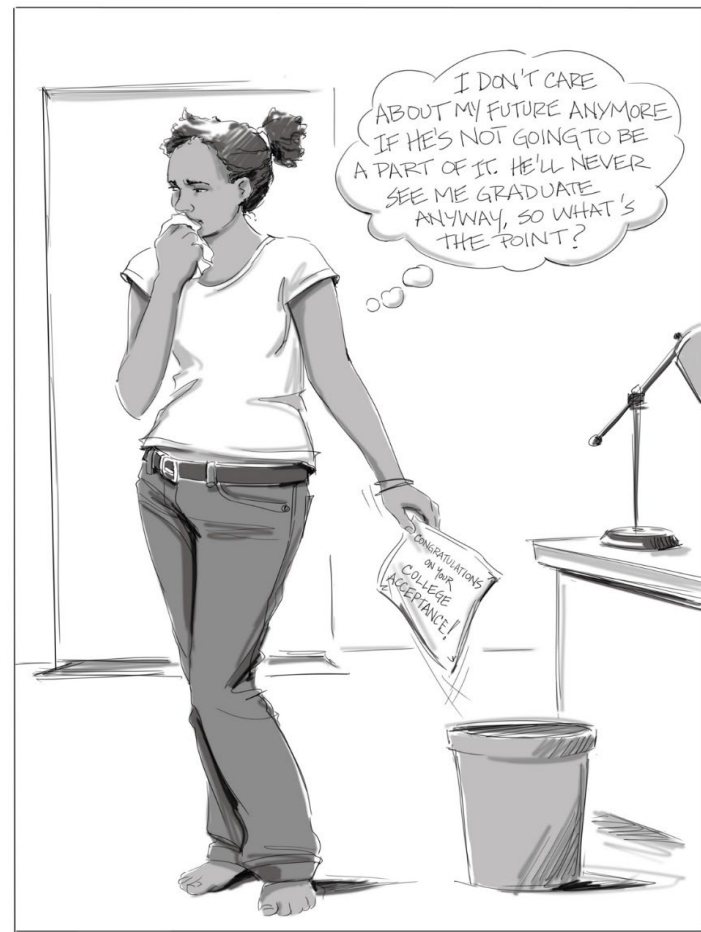
Adaptive/Helpful

Maladaptive/Unhelpful

Facing the Challenge of Separation Distress



Facing the Challenge of Existential Distress



Facing the Challenge of Circumstance-Related Distress



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Grief Reactions in Response to Ambiguous Loss

Separation Distress: preoccupation with person's absence; yearning, longing

Loneliness, fantasies of reunification, anger, protest, uncertainty

"When is Dad coming back? When can I see him again?"

Existential Distress: struggle with one's identity or feeling lost without the person

Feeling different from others; pessimistic outlook on life; identity crisis

"No one understands what this is like. I feel like I don't really know who I am anymore."

Circumstance-Related Distress: preoccupation with how they left

Unable to move forward due to uncertainty of the circumstances; anger; distress;

desires for revenge "I can't stop thinking that he's just going to walk through the door."

Long Term Consequences of Untreated Maladaptive Grief

Kaplow, Angold, & Costello, 2008

Relationship problems

Substance abuse

Poor school grades, school drop-out

Depression

Suicidal thoughts/behaviors

Police involvement (criminal behavior)



Addressing Key Bereavement-Related Challenges Can Change a Child's Trajectory

- **Separation Distress**

“How do I find a way to feel connected to the person, even though he or she is now physically absent?”

- **Existential Distress**

“Who am I as a person, and what is the meaning and purpose of my existence, now that he or she is physically absent?”

- **Circumstance-Related Distress**

“How do I think about, feel about, and come to terms with how this person left?”

Disenfranchised Grief + Research & Therapy Responses

Scope of the Parental Incarceration Challenge

By the numbers...

- ~2.7 million children currently have a parent in jail or prison (US)
- ~5.2 million children have had an incarcerated parent at some point (US)
- Conservatively, that's 7%, or nearly 500,000 of Texas children
- 12% of Texas residents are Black, but they constitute 33% of Texas prisons and 28% of Texas jails.
- 1 in 9 black children has a parent in jail or prison

Sources: National Kids Count (2021). *Children who had a parent who was ever incarcerated*. The Annie E. Casie Foundation. Kids Count (2016). A shared sentence: *The devastating toll of parental incarceration for kids, families, and communities*. The Annie E. Casie Foundation. The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2010) *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's effect on economic mobility*. Bureau of Justice Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau data (2021).

Scope of the Parental Incarceration Challenge

By our social structures...

Disenfranchised grief differs from ordinary grief in that

- The loss cannot be openly acknowledged or publicly mourned
- Those experiencing loss are denied the right to grieve by the larger society

Complex and compounding impacts

- Ambiguous losses, disenfranchised grief, mores toward criminals and crimes, racial disproportionality, social discomfort with grief

Sources: Loss, A. L. (1989). Kenneth J. Doka. *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*, 103; Jones, S. J., & Beck, E. (2007). Disenfranchised grief and nonfinite loss as experienced by the families of death row inmates. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 54(4), 281-299.

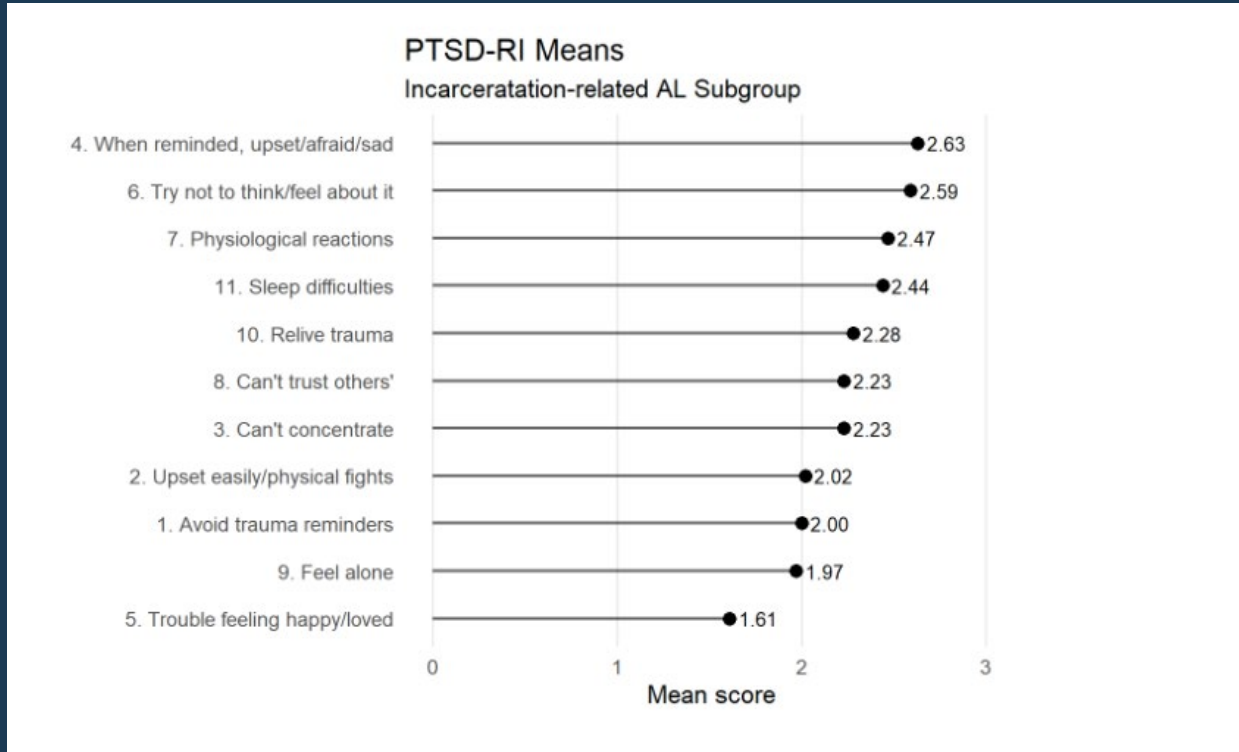
Personal Work & Current Data

Personal Work

- Honoring individual grief reactions as real and valid
- Self-interrogating bias and stigma toward impacted children
- Seven Out of Ten? Not Even Close. *A Review of the Research on the Likelihood of Children Becoming Justice-Involved.* (Conway & Jones, 2015).



Personal Work & Current Data



Multidimensional Grief Theory

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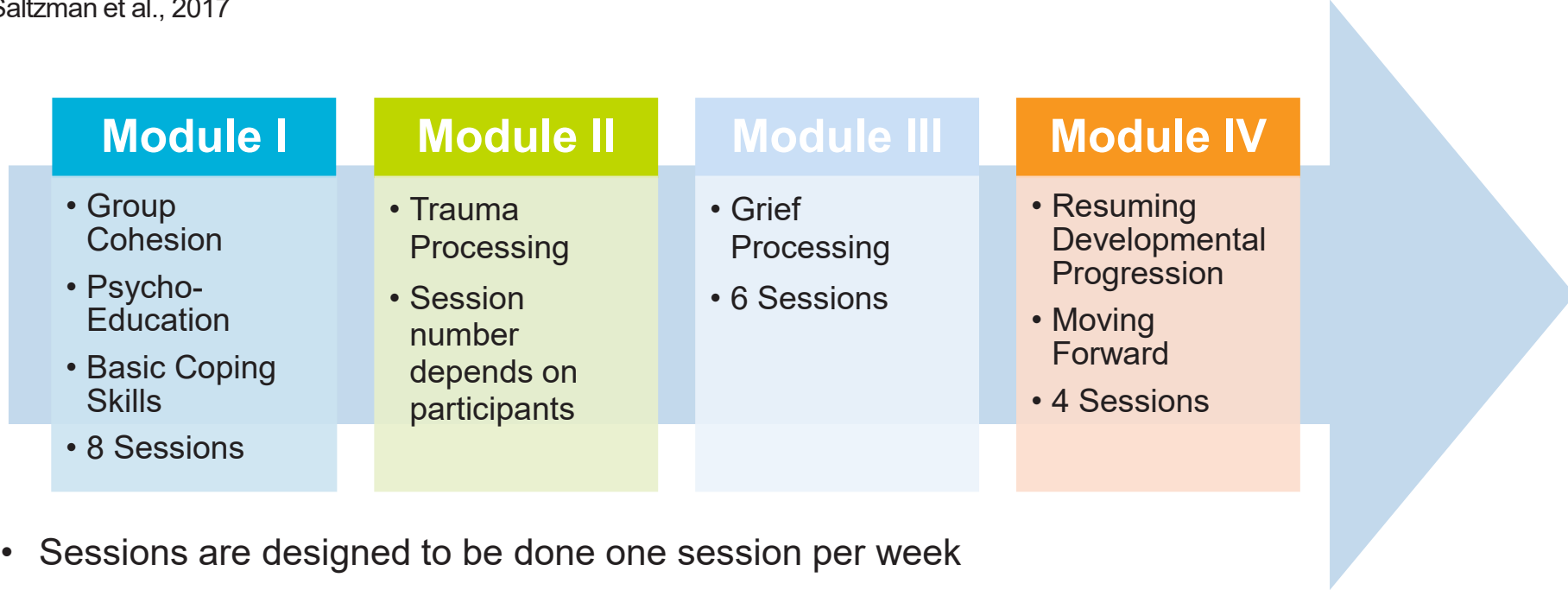
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Personal Work & Current Data

Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents

Saltzman et al., 2017



- Sessions are designed to be done one session per week
- 45-60 minute sessions
- Can be flexibly tailored to fit the needs of your setting (“flexibility within fidelity”)

Multidimensional Grief Therapy

- An assessment-driven intervention based on Multidimensional Grief Theory
- Designed to promote adaptive grief reactions and reduce unhelpful grief reactions
- First evidence-based, grief-focused intervention for children and adolescents that directly addresses the three primary domains of grief
- Provides a “continuum” of grief-informed care given its tiered approach
- Can be used individually or in groups and adapted for ambiguous losses

MULTIDIMENSIONAL GRIEF THERAPY

A Flexible Approach to Assessing
and Supporting Bereaved Youth



Julie B. Kaplow, Christopher M. Layne,
Robert S. Pynoos & William Saltzman

CAMBRIDGE

Medicine

Multidimensional Grief Therapy

Kaplow et al., 2023

**Majorly Missing Them
Mindy**



**Creating Connections
Claire**



Multidimensional Grief Therapy

Kaplow et al., 2023

Sticks and Stones

- Traditional approach (acknowledging internal differences in feelings a child may have about the parent who is incarcerated)
- Disenfranchised grief adaptation (acknowledging external differences in feelings a child may have vs. larger society may have about the parent who is incarcerated)



When to Seek Support



- ✓ Behaviors impact different parts of student's daily life (school, home, with peers)
- ✓ Extreme signs of depression (tearful, not able to get out of bed in the morning) or PTSD
- ✓ Any gesture related to self-harm or mention of suicidal or homicidal ideation

Healing & Restorative Justice

Restoration and Justice within Stories

- ❖ Healing and Liberation Power of Stories
- ❖ Personalized examples of Ambiguous Loss
- ❖ Disenfranchised Grief in Unexpected Places



What Promotes Resilience?



Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are indistinguishable.

- David W Ausburger

Concluding Thoughts and Actions

- ❖ Personal work of undoing PLUS collective reimagining of justice
- ❖ How capable are courts of collecting data of the number of impacted children to inform policy development and resource allocation?
- ❖ Share with ONE other person about the benefit of trauma AND grief informed approaches to this work
- ❖ Where can court systems reduce stress of uncertainty so children and their families can have more time and energy for grief reactions?
- ❖ Move at a different speed than the urgent systems we all operate within so listening and responding is more possible

Thank you!

For more information visit www.tagcenter.org

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