Working with Grieving Immigrant Youth

Presenter:
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Training Objectives

1. Gain awareness of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration traumas.
2. Understand the specific needs of bereaved immigrant children and the most effective ways to help.
3. Identify cultural norms and their effect on the grieving process.
4. Identify 1-4 interventions that can be used with the population.
Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC)

By definition, an Unaccompanied Alien Child (UAC):

- Has no lawful immigration status in the USA.
- Is under 18 years of age.
- Has no parent or legal guardian in the United States or no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to provide care and physical custody.

Following apprehension by a federal agency (usually the Department of Homeland Security, DHS) they are transferred to the care and custody of ORR while awaiting immigration proceedings.

Cared for through a network of state licensed ORR-funded care providers, such as:

- shelter facilities
- foster care or group homes
- staff secure facilities
- residential treatment centers
Where most of the migrants are coming from?
Average number of children in care: 69,550 in FY 2019
Average length of care (discharged): 102 days
Average length of care (in-care): 194 days
Migration Journey

- Bus
- Vehicles
- Walking
- Train
- Caravans
- Boats/rafts
- Combination
Pre-Migration Trauma(s)

Exposure to violence prior to migration

- Violence, gang threats
- Death threats
- Family murdered
- Sexual violence, threats
- Extortion
- Kidnapping
- Domestic Violence
- Poverty, lack of economic opportunities
- Food insecurities
- Combination

## Pre-Migration Trauma(s)

### Severity of Mental Health Symptoms
- 32% of participants reported symptoms indicative of PTSD
- 24% reported symptoms indicative of Major Depressive Disorder
- 17% met criteria for both disorders
- 59% met neither criteria for diagnosis

### Other Considerations
- Grief & Loss
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Worry
- Guilt
- Financial stress
- Substance use

Migration Trauma(s)

Obstacles Include:

- Areas controlled by drug cartels
- Kidnapping, trafficking
- Assault
- Extortion
- Capture, deportation

Some Central American migrants start their journey through Mexico at the Guatemalan border town of Gracias a Dios. Celia Talbot Tobin for NPR
Post-Migration Trauma(s)

Obstacles Include:

- Extended stays in shelters
- Acculturation
- Grief & loss
- Fear & worry for surviving family in country of origin (COO)
- Reunifying with parents or family members
- Unstable living situations
- Legal stress
- Education, workforce
Identifying Needs of Bereaved Immigrant Children


- Participants (N = 101) were born in El Salvador (41%), Guatemala (47%), and Honduras (13%).
- The mean length of time in the US was 1.3 years and ranged from 0.1 to 3 years.

TRAUMATIC EVENTS

- Event in COO: 61%
- Event in Migration: 21%
- Event in the US: 18%
Identifying Needs of Bereaved Immigrant Children

*Special considerations:*
- Pre-migration, migration, and post-migration traumas
- Significant personal losses
- Disrupted family rituals, distanced from COO
- Willingness to seek assistance, mistrust
- Language barriers
Cultural Norms

- **Familismo** - Immediate and extended family play a major role.
- **Machismo** - Men are expected to be grieve in a more reserved manner.
- **Ataque de nervios (ataque)** – culturally shaped manifestation of anxiety and related symptoms
- Crying, weeping, and wailing are often expressed and seen as a sign of love
- Spiritual beliefs: (Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant)
- Supernatural believes
- Mistrust

**Barriletes Guatemala**
Memorandum of Understanding

Shelter Obligations

• Intake questionnaires completed beforehand
• Medical authorization forms U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
• Division of Unaccompanied Children Operations (DUCO) placement authorization form
• Psychological reports, psychiatric reports, inpatient/outpatient services, and medical records (if applicable)
• Minimum of 3 peer support group sessions and/or minimum of 6 individual counseling sessions
• Transportation of UAC and minimum of 2 support staff on premises at all times
• Develop safety plan while in placement and provide safety, resource plan prior to reunification
Special Considerations Interventions

- Shelter restrictions, prohibited items = Paper crafts
- Size of project, portability = Sturdy
- Language and literacy = Expressive art activities
Intervention: My Grief Journey

Supplies:
- Paper
- Glue
- Writing instrument

Purpose:
- Verbalize and express their loss story, grief journey
- Normalize the experience of grief
- Identify obstacles to grief
- Assess coping skills
- Instill felt-sense of hope

Adapted from Boat, Storm, Lighthouse (Post Sprunk, T. (2008)
Intervention: Feelings of Grief

Supplies:
- Cardboard loom
- Yarn or ribbon
- Scissors
- Yarn needles
- Dowel stick (optional)

Purpose:
- Verbalize and express their grief feelings
- Normalize the experience of grief
- Validate the various feelings which are a part of grief
- Expressive release of the grief journey and the accompanying feelings
Intervention: Coping with Changes

Supplies:
- White handkerchief
- Permanent Markers
- Alcohol
- Cup
- Rubber band

Purpose:
- Explore the new environment in which the deceased is no longer living.
- Identify and explore thoughts, feelings, and reactions to changes.
- Normalize and validate.
Intervention: Remembering You

Supplies:
- Acrylic Box
- Magazines, decorative paper
- Scissors, glue, mod podge
- Decorative items, embellishments

Purpose:
- Remember and memorialize our special person
- Recall and share positive memories
References


References continued


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