



THREADS OF HOPE

TRAINING HANDOUT

Funding for this program is provided in whole or in part through the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Block Grant through the American Rescue Plan Act.



Self- Stigma

Thoughts of oneself that lead to shame



Anticipated Stigma

Fear of being treated differently in the future



Public Stigma

collective-negative beliefs



Stigma increases feelings of shame and isolation and decreases help-seeking behavior

HOW TO CHANGE THE IMPACT OF STIGMA



Education



**Share
Experiences**



Shift Behavior



**Challenge
Perceptions**

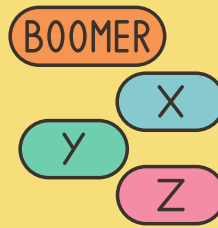
CULTURE IS...



**Ethnic
Racial
Inherited
Spiritual**



Family



Generational



**Community
Geographical
Socioeconomic**

Individualistic



- Values standing out
- Immediate Family is main support
- Traditionally more comfort with professional support

Collectivistic



- Value is in part of larger community
- Extended family often valued in support
- Look to elders to guidance and support

THINGS TO CONSIDER



Who would the key stakeholders be?

Curiosity
Judgement

Considering culture, what questions would help you learn more?



Who needs to be resourced?



FAMILY SYSTEMS

Family Systems Theory (Bowen) recognizes that families do not exist in a vacuum. When one family is struggling, it changes how the family works. Like a mobile, if one piece moves, so does the entire system.

WHAT HELPS?

Higher differentiation of self mean that a family member can recognize their own needs and self, while staying emotionally connected to the family

Education and Self-awareness
Positive Relationship Experience
Coping mechanism
Decision-making patterns (See Guiding Star Activity for Kids & Teens)
Emotional Intelligence
Cognitive flexibility
Self Concept and Identity Formation

EASY COPING SKILLS ACTIVITY

Activity: Making Healthy Coping Stick

Age Group: 7-12 years

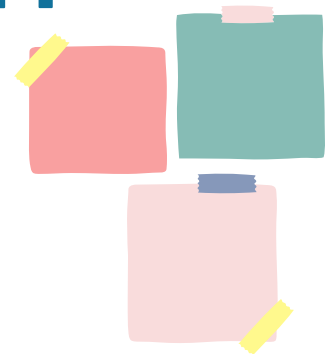
Duration: 30 minutes

Materials Needed: Post its and something to write or draw with (crayons, markers, or pens)

Instructions:

Talk about the different ways we can take care of ourselves. Sometimes it is something like breathing techniques and sometimes its the things we do to have fun. Include that sometimes we do things to cope that are not healthy, like fight with our sibling or break something.

Have kids write down something they can do to take care of themselves when their feelings are big. Stick them on the wall talk about which ones feel healthy and which ones are not. Create a discussion on how they can replace the unhealthy ones with healthy ones. Do this as a group so they can get ideas on new ones to try, like listening to music or talking to an adult.



Activity: My Guiding Stars

Age Group: 7-12 years

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Materials Needed: Paper star templates (or cut-out stars) Markers, crayons, or colored pencils Stickers or decorations (optional) A large sheet of black or blue paper (to represent the night sky) Glue or tape Optional: a pre-drawn constellation template for younger kids



Objective: To help children identify their personal values and strengths, which can act as "guiding stars" in navigating their grief or the effects of addiction.

Instructions:

Introduction: Start by explaining that everyone has unique qualities and values that guide them, like stars in the sky. Share that this activity will help them discover the things that are important to them and what makes them special.

Brainstorm Values and Strengths: Ask the group, "What are some things that are really important to you or things you care about?" Offer examples like kindness, family, courage, honesty, or creativity. Encourage them to think about strengths they've shown, like being a good friend, helping someone, or being brave when facing something hard.

Create Guiding Stars: Give each child 4-5 paper stars. On each star, have them write or draw one value or strength that is important to them. They can decorate their stars with colors and stickers to make them personal and meaningful.

Building a Sky of Strengths: On the large sheet of paper (the "sky"), invite each child to place their stars wherever they like, attaching them with glue or tape. If they wish, they can connect their stars with lines to form a constellation, representing how their values work together to guide them.

Reflection and Sharing: Once everyone's stars are on the "sky," gather the group to admire the shared creation. Ask if anyone wants to share one of their stars and why it's important to them. Reinforce that their values and strengths can help them make choices and feel more confident during tough times.

Adaptations for Older Kids (13-17): Use prompts like: "What's one thing that helps you feel proud of yourself?" "What's something you wish others knew about you?" Allow them to write more complex reflections on their stars, such as short affirmations or quotes that inspire them.

BREAKING THE RULES OF...



From Claudia Black, "It Will Never Happen to Me: Growing Up with Addiction as Youngsters, Adolescents, and Adults."

TALKING WITH KIDS & TEENS

Use age-appropriate language

Share in words that consider their development

Keep it bite-sized

Tell them only what they need to know

Ask if they have questions

Asking open ended questions keeps it childled (I wonder...)

FOSTERING TRUST

Create Consistency and Routine

Find ways to increase predictability in their environment

Actively Listen

Provide space for them to share their story & validate

Make promises that you can keep

Keep them small and achievable

LEARNING TO FEEL

Validate emotions

Emphasis that all feelings are okay

Provide guidance on feelings

Children may have limited language on emotions

Peer Support

Decreases isolation and shows children they are not alone

WHAT HELPS WITH KIDS AND TEENS



CHILDREN & YOUTH GRIEF

WAYS TO SUPPORT

- Honest age-appropriate language
- Provide bite-size information
- Stay child-led - use *open-ended questions*
- Refrain from comparing grief
- Children grieve through play
- Remember special dates
- Say their name and lean in



PLAY IS PART OF GRIEF

- Roleplay
- Builds meaning & understanding
- Opportunity to explore thoughts & feelings
- Provides expression without language
- Builds coping

GRIEF HAS LAYERS

There are many layers to a child and family's grief which can make each experience unique, even when they are grieving the same person. Consider these aspects and how it might change their needs and story.

WHO

HOW

AGE

SUPPORT SYSTEM

CULTURE



MENTAL HEALTH

PAST EXPERIENCES

FAMILY DYNAMICS

SECONDARY LOSS

PERSONALITY

SIBLING GRIEF

- *Invisible Grief*
- Focus on the caregiver and/or childloss
- Shares a co-history with sibling
- Grief in the connection to a shared past
- Creates a shift in identity
- Recognition of mortality
- *Ambivalent loss*
- Move away or towards role and responsibility

WHAT HELPS...

- Talk about the person who died
- Recognize that grief is unique
 - caregivers grief looks different from child's
- Discuss role and responsibility changes
- Build agency

STIGMA FOR CHILDREN GRIEVING A SUBSTANCE USE LOSS

- **SHAME** keeps silence
- Partial sharing or lying about person
 - To child
 - From child
- Rituals and memorials are changed or reduced
- Dehumanize their person
- Feelings of less "right" to grieve
- Fixation on how they died or the substance use and not their person
- **Decreases access to support**

WHAT HELPS...

- Humanize the person who died
- Share memories of their person that include stories beyond the loss timeline
- Validate child's emotions, thoughts, and feelings

Validate ~~≠~~ Agree

- Listen actively and without judgment
- Stay focused on their feelings not details
- Follow up and connect with resources

UNDERSTANDING LOSS

Living losses refer to the ongoing and often ambiguous grief experienced when someone we care about is physically present but emotionally, mentally, or relationally unavailable. In the context of Substance Use Disorder (SUD), these losses can include changes in relationships, routines, and roles within the family. For children, living losses might mean losing the consistency of a parent's support, feeling isolated at school due to stigma, or navigating a home environment that feels unstable. Adults, such as grandparents stepping into parental roles, may grieve the loss of their expected life stage, while also facing diminished support from their peers. Grief support can help by creating spaces for these experiences to be recognized and validated, while also building tools to address the unique needs of each individual. For children, this might involve helping them name their feelings and find supportive adults at home, in school, or in their community. For adults, it could mean connecting them with resources and peer networks to alleviate the isolation that often comes with caregiving or stigma.

Reflective Activity:

Together with your child, take a few moments to draw a "Tree of Loss and Support." On the trunk, write the name of the person or experience related to the SUD. On one side of the branches, list the things that feel "lost" or different, like time spent together, routines, or trust. On the other side, list or draw the people, activities, or places that feel supportive. This visual can help identify where to focus support and encourage open conversations about both loss and resilience.



OVERLAPPING GRIEF AND SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORT



Recovery & Grief Support

- Education supports awareness and needs
- Increase Advocacy and Awareness
- Celebrate, honor, or recognize special dates
- National Days/Months of Awareness
- Benefits from an increase of accessibility to resources and support
- Decreases Stigma for children, youth, and families

ADAPTIVE TASKS FOR FAMILIES

Supporting and Understanding Bereaved Children: Practical Guide
for Professionals

By Pamela Gabbay and Andy McNeil



Reestablish Security & Safety

- Dynamic
- Disrupt sense of predictability
- Increased sense of worry (self, caregivers, and community)
- What if...
- Share and Plan



Affirm & Maintain Boundaries

- Discipline and predictable consequences reestablish safety
- Lack of boundaries can impact health and development
- Keep them clear
- Acknowledge grief or trauma, first before correction
- Be collaborative with child



Restoring Routines

- Routines are supportive to the development
- Restoration of predictability
- Reinforces Safety
- Assess loss you want to keep, change, and let go



Adapt to New Roles and Responsibilities

- Talk about transitions, corporate & identity
- Acknowledge the ways the person is absent
- Caregiver Roles
- Roleplay
- Be flexible

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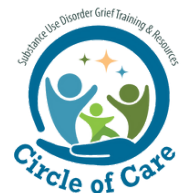
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