

Final Course Reflection

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This course on grief, loss, and bereavement has taught me a lot about the different ways people experience and cope with loss. It provided me the opportunity to learn about the types of grief, how culture affects grief, and the importance of self-care for professionals who work with this population. Through discussion boards and assignments, I was provided the opportunity to reflect on my own experiences and beliefs and think about how I can work with grieving families in my future career as a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS).

One of the major takeaways I have from this course is that loss is not limited to death; symbolic losses, such as divorce, can impact the emotional and financial stability of individuals (Walsh, 2011). This broadened my understanding of loss and helped me realize that symbolic losses, like divorce or losing a job, can be just as impactful as tangible losses, such as death. It changed my thinking by helping me see that all types of loss need recognition and support. Through our class discussion posts, I now understand that everyone experiences loss differently, and it's important to validate all feelings. Recognizing both types of loss is important for providing meaningful and individualized support. As a future CCLS, I will use this understanding to ensure that I validate all forms of loss when working with children and families and offer my support to their unique emotional needs.

I also gained a better understanding of how culture influences the way individuals cope with loss and grief. Before this class, I was less familiar with how varying cultural beliefs and practices shape individuals' reactions and understandings to loss (Walsh, 2011). Weymont & Rae (2007) provided a worksheet titled "Is There Life After Death," which included questions about various beliefs regarding death for us to agree or disagree with. This activity helped me reflect on my own beliefs about death while also encouraging me to acknowledge and understand others' perspectives. It made me realize that I need to be aware of any unconscious biases I have

about how grief “should” look, now knowing how cultural norms can influence this process. Practicing cultural sensitivity allows CCLSs to discuss death and the grieving process with patients and families in a way that feels most comfortable and respectful to them. As a future CCLS, I will prioritize learning about each family's cultural background and beliefs to better guide conversations about loss and grief in a way that aligns with their beliefs.

Additionally, I found it valuable to learn about supporting children coping with an ill parent, including recognizing the warning signs that they may be struggling. McCue (2011) explains how children struggling to cope with a parent's illness may develop continuous behavioral patterns that reflect underlying emotional distress and unmet needs. After reading the stories in *How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness*, I learned that recognizing these behavioral patterns can help caregivers and professionals identify when a child is struggling emotionally. Understanding these signs allows for early intervention, providing the necessary support to help children process their feelings in a healthy way and prevent long-term emotional damage (McCue, 2011). In my future career as a CCLS, I will use this knowledge to observe children's behaviors, provide a safe space for them to express their emotions, and guide their families in supporting them during challenging times.

Throughout this course, we have discussed the important role of self-care for patients, families, and professionals. McCoyd & Walter (2016) emphasize the significance of prioritizing the well-being of professionals, as their mental and emotional health directly impacts their ability to provide effective support to patients and families. Establishing self-care practices helps professionals manage stress, prevent burnout, and provide their highest quality of care. These practices may include “mindfulness exercises on one's own, engaging in contemplative practices, or finding routines that help one stay healthy” (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 25). For

me, when I begin to feel stressed or burnt out, taking a walk around the block helps me refocus and regain a positive outlook. I also enjoy participating in weekly horseback riding lessons, which serve as a therapeutic activity to maintain my mental health and overall well-being.

References

- McCoyd, J.L.M., & Walter, C. A. (2016). Grief and loss across the lifespan: A biopsychosocial perspective (2nd ed.). New York: Springer.
- McCue, K. (2011). *How to help children through a parent's serious illness*. New York: St. Martins.
- Walsh, K. (2011). Grief and loss: Theories and skills for the helping professions (3rd ed.). New York: Pearson.
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