

Interview Reflection: Kelsey Mora, CCLS

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Throughout this semester, we have learned about grief and the importance of supporting families and children through the emotional process of bereavement. I had the opportunity to interview Kelsey Mora, a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) in Illinois, to gain professional insight into her experiences and any advice she has for me as an aspiring CCLS. I was able to reflect on her responses by connecting them with the knowledge I have gained from this course regarding grief, family-centered care, and cultural competency. This interview helped deepen my understanding of the challenges in working with families facing loss and provided strategies to support them. In this reflection, I will discuss what I learned, what surprised me, and how this knowledge will shape my future career as a Child Life Specialist.

I began the interview by asking Kelsey if she remembered the first time she worked with a patient and their family who were dying, and if she has grown as a professional since that experience. Although she didn't recall the very first time, she shared that she had worked with many dying patients during her time in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). She explained how being with patients and their families during such sacred and sensitive moments was a privilege for her. I was surprised by her perspective, as death is often viewed as a negative experience. Her ability to reframe these moments into meaningful opportunities to support families was both inspiring and eye-opening. This response helped me see the importance of finding positivity and purpose, even in the most difficult situations.

I then asked Kelsey about the coping skills she teaches families and patients when they are dealing with death. She highlighted that coping skills are transferable to a variety of challenging situations and everyday stressors. I appreciated her perspective, as it reminds me that many coping tools only need small adjustments to fit specific circumstances. This idea is

something I will carry into my future career, as it reinforces the value of teaching families' skills they can continue to use beyond their immediate crisis. Walsh (2011) emphasizes that open communication about death and feelings of grief is crucial during these times, aligning with Kelsey's belief that being present with the individual is key when dealing with death.

Another topic I explored with Kelsey was how she approaches cultural or religious differences with families facing the impending death of a child. She emphasized the importance of leading with curiosity and openness when navigating these sensitive situations. She shared specific starter questions, such as, "Help me understand what's most meaningful for you right now," or "Are there parts of your identity or family that you'd like us to better understand related to this experience?" I found this insight incredibly valuable, as these types of questions can help build trust and encourage open communication. This is something I will reflect on as I prepare for my upcoming practicum experience. Misconceptions about grief, especially on a cultural level, can lead to discomfort or isolation for the grieving individual (Walsh, 2011). Kelsey's advice will help me avoid these difficulties and instead, develop meaningful connections with families from diverse backgrounds.

As I continue my path toward becoming a CCLS, I have often wondered how to effectively work with families who are in the denial stage of a diagnosis. Kelsey's perspective was both enlightening and reassuring. She explained that denial is often a way for parents to process overwhelming information and make sense of their situation in their own way. Denial is not necessarily about rejecting the reality of a diagnosis but about gradually adjusting to it (McCoyd & Walter, 2016). Kelsey suggested that leading conversations by trying to understand the family's perspective, rather than attempting to convince them of the situation, can be far more effective. She also emphasized that this process happens on the family's timeline, not the

professionals. This insight is something I will carry with me, as it reinforces the importance of patience and empathy when guiding families through their grieving process.

Family-centered care is a crucial aspect of working with pediatric patients in healthcare. I wanted to learn more about how Kelsey supports family-centered care and if her approach varies based on the different families she works with. McCue (2011) shares stories that demonstrate how family-centered care focuses on all members of the family, not just the patient. For example, in Artie's story, his failing grades were a subtle sign of his struggles, even though he didn't openly express his feelings. A family-centered approach involves recognizing these signs and supporting the child in ways that meet their emotional and developmental needs. Helping Artie stay involved in activities he enjoyed showed how structure and support can make a significant difference (McCue, 2011). Kelsey explained that her approach often changes depending on whether she is working with a child, parent, or sibling, and she adjusts her interactions accordingly. However, I was surprised that she did not provide much detail about how she implements family-centered care in her role, which left me wanting to learn more about her methods.

Legacy activities are another essential part of helping families cope with the death of a loved one. These activities not only preserve memories but also provide a therapeutic way for siblings and other family members to process their emotions. It is important to allow children to engage in these activities at their own comfort level, giving them the space to participate when they feel ready (McCoyd & Walter, 2016). During my interview with Kelsey, she shared several creative legacy activities, such as scrapbooking, memory boxes, and handprint art. These activities provide siblings with a meaningful way to stay connected to their loved one while also supporting their emotional healing. By incorporating creativity and emotional support, legacy

activities play an important role in helping children navigate grief and feel a sense of connection and remembrance.

To conclude the interview, I asked Kelsey about the best piece of advice she received before becoming a CCLS and what advice she could offer me as a student preparing for this field. She emphasized the importance of trusting that you are where you are needed most and reminded me to focus on balancing the many demands of the job while also prioritizing self-care and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This advice really stuck with me because it reminds me of how important it is to stay focused and grounded in a job that can be emotionally challenging. In the future, I plan to create routines for self-care such as going on short walks outside and talk about feelings and thoughts to prevent “burnout and compassion fatigue” (Walsh, 2011). I also need to remember to trust the purpose and impact of my work.

This interview allowed me to connect what I have been learning in this course to real-life situations that CCLS’s encounter in their day-to-day work. It has given me a deeper understanding of what it means to support families and children through grief and loss, as well as the positive impact CCLS’s have on individuals navigating these experiences. Reflecting on this interview also helped me recognize my own areas for growth as an aspiring CCLS. Discussing cultural barriers made me realize that I may carry biases I am not fully aware of, and it emphasized the importance of staying open to the different ways families process grief, particularly when it involves cultural or religious differences. Working in this field can bring emotional challenges, and I have come to understand the importance of recognizing when I need to prioritize mindfulness and self-care. By maintaining a consistent self-care routine, I can ensure that I remain both effective and present in my role. This reflection has reinforced the significance

of approaching each family with empathy, patience, and respect while also taking care of myself to maintain my ability to support others.

References

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