

Group Session #2 Reflection: Divorce and Separation

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For our group session, five of my classmates and I met on Sunday, November 3rd, at 7:00 PM via Zoom. During this session, we focused on the topic of divorce and separation and how it can be viewed as another type of loss that a family can experience. I served as one of the facilitators for this group session and began our meeting by asking my classmates what they believed a family was and if they thought there was such a thing as a perfect family. I started the conversation by explaining that I have not been through a divorce, as my parents are still together. Still, I have seen the impact of divorce through several friends who have experienced this type of loss. I also explained my belief that there is no such thing as a "perfect" family. Many families look different from others; caregivers may be grandparents or other relatives due to the loss of a relationship or even the death of parents. I believe families can be perfect in their own way, but no family can fit a universal standard of perfection. One of my classmates agreed, stating that there is no such thing as a perfect relationship, as every family has its ups and downs. Another classmate shared that their friend's parents went through a divorce, and they constantly compare their family dynamic to others, which adds to their struggle. We discussed how social media portrays an unrealistic image of the "perfect family" with a mom, dad, and siblings all getting along. This image creates a standard that most families do not meet, leading to feelings of inadequacy or loss. Conflict, behavioral issues, and external events often impact families in ways that reflect challenges.

We have learned throughout this class that, in addition to death, experiences like divorce and separation can cause significant grief and loss (Walsh, 2011). These losses are called symbolic losses, which are non-death-related losses that can greatly impact someone. McCoyd & Walter (2016) explains that children affected by parental divorce often experience complex emotions, including feelings of guilt and responsibility, due to "omnipotent and magical

thinking" (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 90). This phenomenon can cause children to believe they caused the divorce, which can lead to deep emotional distress. Additionally, children might feel like "forgotten mourners" because the focus often shifts to the legal parts of divorce instead of their emotional needs (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 90). During the session, I realized how deeply divorce impacts children and adolescents and how it can act as grief. Divorce disrupts a child's sense of stability, leading to changes in family structure, financial circumstances, and daily routines. This loss of security and routine can be very hard for children. As McCoyd & Walter (2016) suggest, meeting children's need for stability is important, and structured support, like peer groups, can help them process their feelings and feel less alone.

As a future child life specialist, this information will help me work with kids who are part of a divorced family. Understanding that divorce can lead to grief-like symptoms in children will allow me to provide the support they need. In my future work, I plan to use activities suggested by Weymont & Rae (2007) that allow children to describe what their home and family look like so that they feel like their experiences are heard. Giving children a space to share their feelings and connect with others can help them adapt and feel more comfortable.

Reflecting on this session, I felt that hearing my classmates' perspectives on this type of loss helped me recognize the importance of addressing all forms of grief, not just those related to death. The discussion helped me see the role of mental health professionals in supporting children through complex losses. Walsh (2011) notes that teachers and school staff work with grieving students but usually lack proper training to respond. This can make students feel unsupported, highlighting the need for grief education in training programs.

As a facilitator, the session went well in encouraging open discussion and creating a safe space for sharing. Our group is very open to sharing personal stories, which I feel makes us feel

closer as a group, making it easier to engage in meaningful conversation. I was able to ask thought-provoking questions, and my classmates actively participated. However, I could have structured the conversation more tightly to cover a broader range of topics. At the end of the session, I also found it challenging to incorporate the worksheets from the online textbook.

References

- McCoyd, J.L.M., & Walter, C. A. (2016). Grief and loss across the lifespan: A biopsychosocial perspective (2nd ed.). New York: Springer.
- Walsh, K. (2011). Grief and loss: Theories and skills for the helping professions (3rd ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Weymont, D., & Rae, T. (2006) Supporting young people coping with grief, loss and death. London: Sage.