

Efficacy of a Camp-Based Intervention for Childhood Traumatic Grief

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Objective: This study examined the efficacy of a short-term, camp-based, trauma-focused grief intervention in reducing traumatic grief and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in parentally bereaved children. *Method:* For this nonequivalent comparison group study, 100 children were split into two groups, with one group serving as the immediate treatment group and the second group serving as the delayed treatment group. *Results:* The results were analyzed using chi-square, independent samples t tests, multiple and logistic regression and showed this short-term intervention to be followed by reduced traumatic grief and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. *Conclusions:* The results are discussed in relation to current research on and practice with bereaved children as well as implications for future research.

Keywords: childhood traumatic grief; traumatic grief; childhood bereavement; children's grief; bereavement camp; grief intervention

Bereavement, the objective experience of losing a loved one to death (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2002), often has serious consequences for children. They may experience developmental delays as well as long-term psychiatric, social, and psychological struggles (Felner, Stolberg, & Cowen, 1975; Florian & Mikulincer, 1997; Kaffman & Elizur, 1979; Kranzler, Shaffer, & Wasserman, 1990; Lloyd, 1980; Worden & Silverman, 1996). Thirty-seven percent of prepubertal children, for example, suffer from major depression a year after the loss of a parent (Weller, Weller, Fristad, & Bowes, 1991). Unfortunately, perhaps the most serious form of bereavement in children—losing a parent—is not uncommon. In the United States alone, it is estimated that 1 out of every 20 children younger than the age of 15 has lost one or both parents because of death (Steen, 1998), and close to 2 million children receive death benefits from a deceased worker (Social Security Administration, 2007). Yet little is known about effective interventions for these children. The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to examine the efficacy of a short-term social

work intervention for parentally bereaved children and, second, to compare the outcomes between children who have lost parents to an expected versus an unexpected death.

Considering both the large number of children who lose a parent to death and the unique and overwhelming nature of such loss during childhood (Worden, Davies, & McCown, 1999), it is surprising that no conclusive intervention has been found to help parentally bereaved children. In fact, outcome studies have shown mixed results. Group intervention has been shown to improve self-concept and decrease grief scores in children (Graham, 1999); school counselors have reported the benefits of grief groups in school (Samide & Stockton, 2002); and older children have shown a decrease in conduct disorder and depression problems after participation in a family bereavement program (Sandler et al., 2003; Sandler, West, Baca, & Pillow, 1992). Other studies have found that participating in bereavement counseling or intervention groups has no significant impact on children's level of depression, anxiety, grief adjustment, acting-out behavior, and self-esteem (Adams, 1996; Huss & Ritchie, 1999; Schilling, Koh, Abramovitz, & Gilbert, 1992). However, recent research focusing on the interaction between trauma and grief symptoms (e.g., Eth & Pynoos, 1994; Goenjian et al., 1997; Nader, Pynoos, Fairbanks, & Frederick, 1990; Pynoos, 1992; Pynoos et al., 1993; Saltzman, Steinberg, Layne, Aisenberg, & Pynoos, 2001)

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