



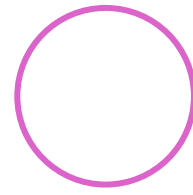
Center for Applied  
Research Solutions

# Three Lenses of Childhood Grief & Bereavement

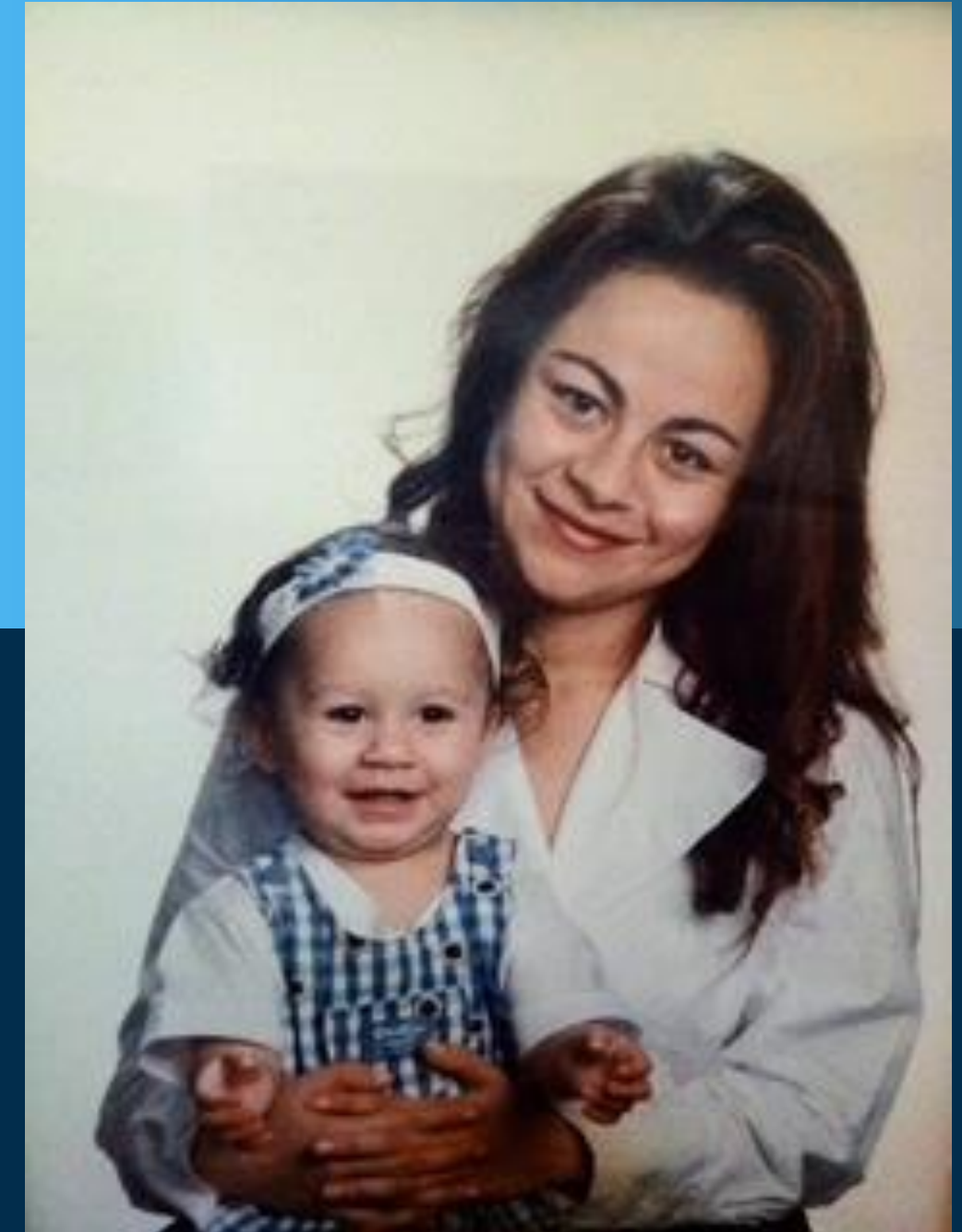
Holding Grief Through the Eyes of a Child, a Parent  
and Clinician

Angela Castellanos, LCSW  
*Center for Applied Research Solutions*





# Welcome & Introductions





# Collective Breath

- When you hear the word grief, what shows up in your body?
- What helps you stay grounded when emotions feel heavy?



“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”

— Vicki Harrison



# How Children Experience Grief and Bereavement



# How Children Experience Grief and Bereavement



*Bereavement-  
Experience of deprivation or loss by death.*

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*Grief- Psychological or behavioral response arising from bereavement*

*- Julie Kaplow, PhD  
Trauma and Grief Center*

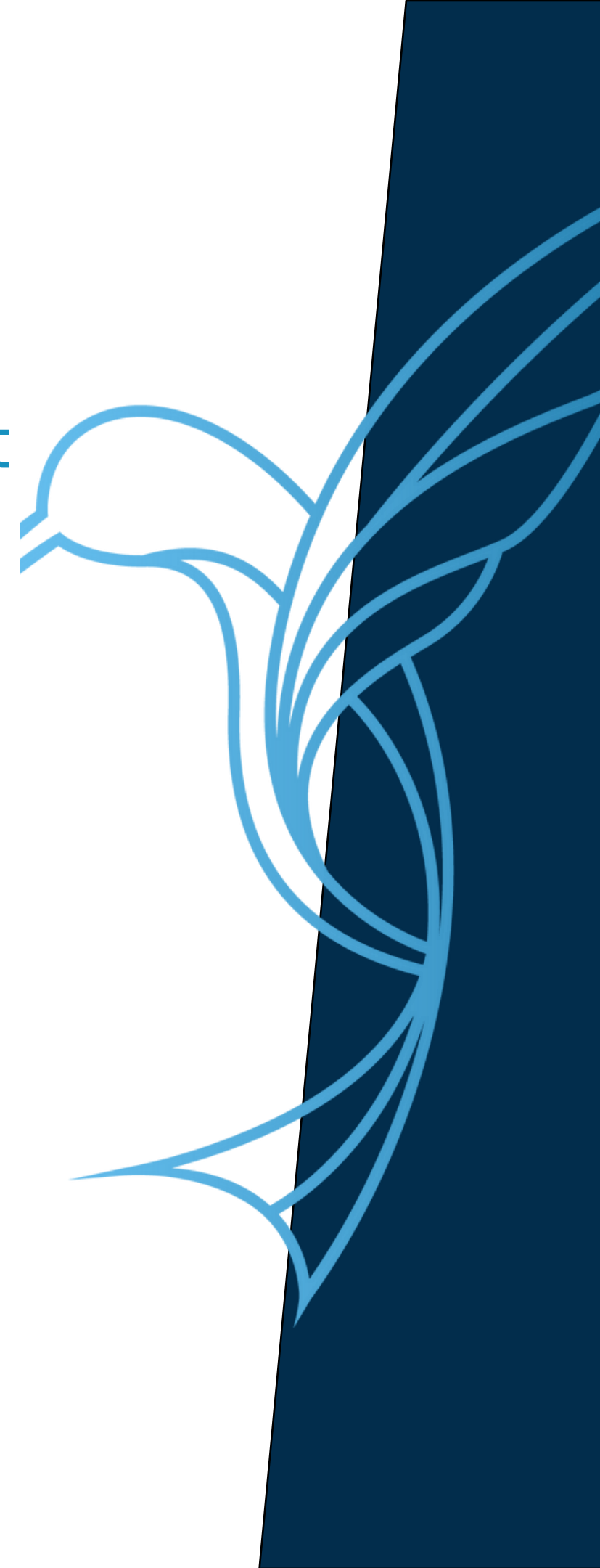
# What does death mean to..

Toddlers Preschoolers	School-aged (6-9)	School-aged (10-12)	Adolescents
Experience sense of "gone-ness"	Struggle with concepts of body vs. soul	Better able to grasp concept of body vs. spirit	Struggle with larger life questions (why me?)
Often believe that death is reversible	See death as something tangible or physical	May believe that their own actions caused the death	May test own mortality with risk-taking behaviors
Struggle with body's lack of functioning	Worry about surviving caregivers	More realistic about permanency of death, which is why we start to see more psychological distress in this age group	More likely to develop psychiatric symptoms given understanding of death
Play out aspects of death			Greater focus on how death will affect own future

“When my dad died, I wasn’t aware of what bereavement meant, but I do remember feeling nauseous, and I knew something was wrong. As an 8-year-old this meant my body was telling me that I was experiencing something, but I couldn’t figure out what that was. After the crisis, I remember every single detail.”

-Jamee Castellanos

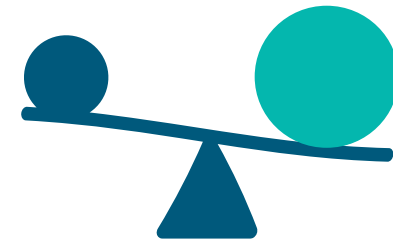
<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/what-did-and-does-bereavement-mean-to-you-a-conversation-between-a-school-social-worker-and-her-daughter/>



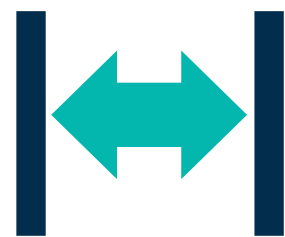
# How Children Experience Grief and Bereavement



Most bereaved children will go on to lead healthy, happy, productive lives.



There is no set timeline for grief.



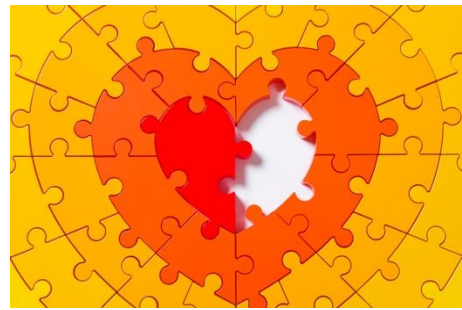
There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve.



Grief is not a “problem” to be fixed. It is a natural part of life and a reflection of the love we have for the person who died.

# Three Primary Bereavement-Related Challenges

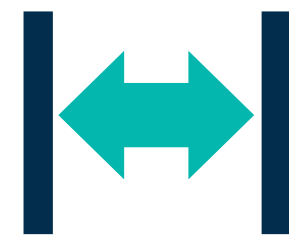
Based on Multidimensional Grief Theory  
*Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos (2011) & Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman, Cozza, & Pynoos (2013)*



Separation Distress  
(Missing Them)



Existential Distress (Feeling  
lost without them)



Circumstance-Related  
Distress (Worrying about  
the Way They Died)

.



**Three Lenses of Childhood  
Grief and Bereavement:**

***Daughter's Lens***

***Mother's Lens***

***Clinician's Lens***



# Daughter's Lens

- Big feelings without language
- Grief expressed through play or silence
- Feelings that come in waves
- Need for safety, honesty, and permission to feel





# Mother's Lens

- Holding while supporting
- Fear of doing the “wrong” thing
- Pressure to hold it together
- Needing guidance, reassurance and support too!





# Clinician's Lens

- Walking alongside without fixing
- Interpreting behaviors without trying to fix it
- Balancing professional role and human response
- Holding secondary grief and emotional impact



“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”

— Vicki Harrison



# What I Wish I Had Known Then



# What I wish I Had Known Then....

- ***I didn't need perfect words***
  - Silence could be supportive
  - Naming feelings mattered more than explaining them
  - It was okay to say, *"I don't know, but I'm here."*
- ***Presence mattered more than answers***
  - Staying regulated mattered more than getting it right
  - My child needed my steadiness, not solutions
  - Grief didn't need fixing—it needed space
- ***I needed support too***
  - Being a clinician didn't mean I was immune
  - I needed places where I wasn't "the helper."
  - Caring for myself helped me stay present
- ***Asking for help was protective for my child***
  - Support didn't weaken my role as a parent
  - It strengthened my capacity to show up
  - Community made grief more survivable

Draw a continuous spiral as slowly & tightly as possible



**Prompts:**  
**Which lens do you most often occupy?**  
**Which lens receives the least support?**  
**Which lens receives the most?**  
**What would change if all three were honored?**

**As we close...**

One thing I am taking with me...

One way I can offer myself or others more  
gentleness...

*My awareness has helped me to understand these emotions, that they may creep up at times, and that I may not want to work through them at the moment. But I go back to being kind and compassionate knowing "that this too shall pass" and it's a process. It has been helpful to stay focused on the present, work with what's in front of you, and let it take its course. This is how the process works, there are ups and downs and the grief stages do not happen in order.*

*I continue to seek support when I need it. I am more comfortable with sharing my story with others and happy that I have the support I need in my life to feel safe, secure and loved. JC*



# Helpful Resources

Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I. N., & Kaplow, J. B. (2022). *Developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents: Caregivers as key grief facilitators*. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 16(2), 447–457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00435-0>

Castellanos, A. (2021, November 15). *What did and does bereavement mean to you? A conversation between a school social worker and her daughter*. *School Crisis Recovery & Renewal*. <https://schoolcrisishealing.org/what-did-and-does-bereavement-mean-to-you-a-conversation-between-a-school-social-worker-and-her-daughter/>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2018). *The power of parenting: How to help your child after a parent or caregiver dies*. National Child Traumatic Stress Network. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/power-of-parenting-how-to-help-your-child-after-a-parent-or-caregiver-dies>



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NEW YORK LIFE  
FOUNDATION

# Life After Loss

A vibrant hummingbird with iridescent green and blue feathers and a long, thin beak, shown in flight on the right side of the title.

**A Special, No-Cost Two-Day Virtual Summit Exploring Grief Aftermath  
for Educators, Mental Health Providers, School Leaders, and Child Advocates**

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