

# **SEPARATION, GRIEF AND LOSS IN CHILD WELFARE**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION**

This workshop discusses the painful issues of grief and loss due to separation from parents and families that regularly confront children, parents, foster parents and social workers in child welfare practice. Losses include loss of family and people in the child's life, loss of friends and teachers, loss of familiar surroundings, loss of innocence due to abuse, and the possible loss of relationship potential due to emotional neglect. Specific strategies for helping both children/youth and caregivers confront and deal with issues of grief and loss will be presented.

Topics include:

- Overview of separation and loss issues for child welfare clients
- The influence of attachment on separation responses
- Contributing factors to children's emotional responses to separation and placement
- Separation and grief: Psychological tasks and attempts at mastery
- Reactions to loss: common behavior patterns during the grieving process
- Effects of children's developmental level on their experience of loss
- Long term consequences of excessive emotional distress for children in placement
- Helping caregivers to help children grieve
- Specific strategies to help clients find healthy relief from feelings of loss

### **TARGET AUDIENCE**

This workshop will be helpful to professionals and para-professionals in a variety of positions, including: social workers, therapists, foster and kinship care providers, CASA workers and other volunteers, educators and other community partners working with child welfare clients and their families.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- To understand the impact of separation from family on children's development and emotional well being
- To understand the contributing factors to children's emotional responses to separation and placement
- To identify the psychological tasks and attempts at mastery for children dealing with grief and loss
- To outline the common behavior patterns of the grieving process
- To grasp the long term consequences of excessive emotional distress for children separated from their families
- To learn how workers and caregivers can help children grieve and mourn their losses.

### **Ways that Supervisors can support the transfer of learning from the classroom to the job:**

**Before the training:** Workers should be encouraged to come to the workshop prepared to discuss specific clients, caregivers, and situations in which issues of grief and loss impacted the relationship between the child/youth and others interacting with them. In addition, participants are encouraged to come prepared to discuss their own personal concerns around issues of grief and loss and the difficulty they may have encountered with either parents, children, or caregivers knowing how to confront and deal with these issues.

**After the training:** Supervisors can support workers in trying to implement some of the strategies presented in their own relationships with child/adolescent clients, and also to assist them with strategies to support caregivers in helping children deal with their issues of loss.

## **TRAINING METHODS**

- Historical review of early insights into profound issues of separation for infants and children
- Review of research related to grief and loss
- Videotaped demonstrations of children's experience of grief and loss
- Group discussions
- Development of strategies to be used to help children mourn