Seasons for Growth

Children and Young People's Program

What is *Seasons for Growth Grief Education*?

- *Seasons for Growth* is a small group grief and loss education program for children and young people aged 5-18 years.

- *Seasons for Growth* is based on the belief that change and loss are part of life, and grief is a normal response to these losses.

- The program aims to promote resilience, to enhance coping strategies and to develop life skills in children and young people.

What does *Seasons for Growth* do?

- *Seasons for Growth* helps children and young people to:

- Learn about how the death of a loved one, parental separation/ divorce, or other significant loss event may impact on their lives

- Learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to understand and respond well to such experiences, including:
  - understanding the grief process
  - recognising their feelings and other reactions to loss are normal
  - developing skills for coping, problem solving and decision making
  - building a peer-support network
  - restoring self-confidence and self-esteem.

The story of the seasons

- Based on the work of J William Worden
- Using the metaphor of the four seasons as a framework to explore the experience of change, loss and grief participants recognise:
  - no season lasts forever
  - each season is unique and important for our growth
  - each season has its own story, there are easy days and difficult days
  - seasons are unpredictable
  - individuals experience the seasons differently
  - we find different ways to adapt to changes within each season
  - seasonal change is often silent, gradual and unseen.

Program structure

- *Seasons for Growth* has a sound curriculum structure and utilises a wide range of creative learning activities. It is a small group (4-7 participants), peer based program of eight sessions followed by a celebration and two optional 'reconnector' sessions.

- The program consists of four levels:
  - Level 1 (ages 5-7 years)
  - Level 2 (ages 8-10 years)
  - Level 3 (ages 10-11 years)
  - Level 4 (ages 11-18 years)
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- The group is led by a trained adult facilitator ('Companion').

What do the participants learn about in the program?

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- The following table provides an overview of the way in which
- *Seasons for Growth* integrates the grief tasks with the program content:

Worden's Tasks	*Seasons for Growth®* Tasks		Session Content
To accept the reality of the loss	Learn that change and loss are part of life	AUTUMN	**Session 1:** Life is like the seasons **Session 2:** Change is part of life
To process the pain of grief	Learn about different ways people experience change and loss	WINTER	**Session 3:** Valuing my story **Session 4:** Naming my feelings
To adjust to a changed world after the loss	Learn skills to assist with adapting to change and loss	SPRING	**Session 5:** Caring for my feelings **Session 6:** Remembering the good times
To find an enduring connection with what has been lost while embarking on a new life	Learn about ways that help in moving forward with life	SUMMER	**Session 7:** Making good choices **Session 8:** Moving forward

In the school context

World Health Organization model (adapted by Wyn et al. 2000, from Hendren, Birrell Weissen & Orley 1994).

Children's experiences of loss and grief

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- Experience of loss and grief is unique for each child
- Children may experience many different feelings, including sadness, anxiety, anger, resentment, guilt and relief, amongst others
- Children and young people may show physical and behavioural reactions, including:
  - difficulty concentrating
  - changes in schoolwork or results
  - changes in behaviour or participation in activities – acting out or withdrawn
  - changes in sleep patterns, appetite, weight loss/gain

2010 Evaluation by Southern Cross University
2019 International Evaluation

- The evaluation identified *Seasons for Growth* as unique because of the program's …

- theoretical orientation
- structure and educational processes
- variations in implementation
- ongoing demand over time.

Evaluation Conclusions

Seasons for Growth has a strong, positive effect on young people Parents, Companions, school principals and agency managers believe without exception that the program is beneficial to participants	The participants said that the program had removed their sense of isolation, allowed them to express their feelings without being ashamed of them and helped them to develop trust in others.	*Seasons for Growth* contributes broadly to intervention against youth suicide in that it provides an early system of safety, opportunities for identification and referral and lessening of vulnerability.

Many participants said they had been able to:

Seek support when necessary from the Companion outside the formal processes of the program	Form friendships and support networks with others in the program Communicate better with their parents and siblings	Understand that life moves on and that changes do happen Cope better with their emotions

Seasons for Growth 2019 Evaluation: Overview

Overall the results support the suggestion that program attendance is likely to be associated with an improvement in the quality of life of children and young people and that this is maintained after the program has finished. This is a very positive finding; particularly given that many of the children and young people had experienced more than one significant loss or change events. The qualitative feedback provided by young people and parents also clearly showed just how valued the work of the Companion is.

Supporting children during times of change

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- Worden (1996) identified that grieving children need the following:
    - Adequate information
    - Fears and anxieties addressed
    - Reassurance they are not to blame
    - Careful listening
    - Validation of individual's feelings
    - Help with overwhelming feelings
    - Modelled grief behaviours
    - Opportunities to remember
    - Involvement and inclusion
    - Continued routine activities.

The words of children and young people

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- *"you understand and are aware of some changes in life and also understand what others are feeling and when"*

- *"I feel good, and I feel like I don't need to cry anymore about my dad"*

- *"YAY I AM COMING TO SEASONS … It's not that I have to come it's that I want to come"*

- *"its made me a stronger person and made me believe in myself a lot more"*

The words of children and young people

- *"good, it's nice to experience something where they actually listen to you and give decent advice, rather than telling you to get over it, like other counsellors I've had. It was good getting to know others who have suffered and are getting over it."*

- *"calmer than usual I'm normally angry"*

- *"I made lots of friends in the Seasons for Growth group."*

Evidence from other contexts…

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Parental Separation

- Change
- Personal
- Not specifically threatening

Foster Care

- On-going change
- Personal
- Underlying safety issues / trauma

War

- On-going change & loss
- Community wide
- Sustained, obvious threat & damage
- Difficulties meeting basic needs
- Trauma

Terrorism

- Some change
- Community wide
- On-going invisible threat
- Trauma

Natural Disasters

- Change
- Community wide
- On-going threat
- Visible damage & loss
- Traumatic experience

Evidence from other contexts…

Regardless of the context… the same insights emerge time and time again regarding what helps and hinders children to grow positively during uncertainty and adapt well to change

What influences coping?

(Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2014a,b; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Masten 2001; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017; Mooney et al., 2017; Mutch, 2013; Pine et al., 2015; Shepard et al., 2017; Stone, 2017; Townshend et al., 2015; Trickey et al., 2012)

What influences coping?

- Parental (Un)employment
- Family economics
- Schooling
- Health
- Bereavement
- Extent of additional changes

(Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2014a,b; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Masten 2001; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017; Mooney et al., 2017; Mutch, 2013; Orgilés et al., 2020; Pine et al., 2015; Shepard et al., 2017; Stone, 2017; Townshend et al., 2015; Trickey et al., 2012)

What influences coping?

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- Personality /character
- Understanding and cognitive processing
- Pre-existing mental health issues or trauma
- Age?
- Social and emotional skills

Personal Factors

(Masten & Narayan, 2012; Mooney et al., 2017; Page et al., 2011; Schonfield et al., 2015)

What influences coping?

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- Family relationships
- Open communication
- Role modelling of positive adjustment
- Involvement in decisions
- Wider support
- Help others / sense of purpose

Social Factors

(Baggerly & Exum, 2008; Comer et al., 2014; Freeman, Nairn & Gollop, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2014; Goldberg, 2019; Lazarus et al., 2002; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Mooney et al., 2017; Mutch, 2018; Orgilés et al., 2020; Peek et al., 2018; Pine et al., 2015; Shepard et al., Sprang & Silman, 2013; Stone, 2017)

Social & Emotional Skills

Seasons for Growth

- Small-group loss and grief education programme
- Metaphor of the seasons helps children understand that change and loss are a normal part of life
- Explores what we may experience and ways we can respond and adapt
- Provides an opportunity to gain understanding, skills and attitudes to adapt well

stormbirds
Growing through natural disaster

What children learn in Seasons

- Learn that change and uncertainty are part of life
- Learn about different ways people experience uncertainty, change and loss
- Learn skills to assist with adapting to change
- Learn about ways to help in moving forward with life

Help with managing feelings

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- Let children know it is ok to feel sad, angry etc. after a big change
- Help them to recognise and identify their feelings
- Help them to understand whilst feelings are ok, the usual boundaries apply for behaviour and actions – maintaining boundaries helps children feel safe and retain normality
- Help children to find other techniques or ways to diffuse overwhelming feelings

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