LEADING THROUGH LOSS

Dr. Vickie Hughes
Conflict of Interest

- This study has not been funded by any source.
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Introduction

■ One of the most painful experiences for any parent is the death of a child.
■ Not only is the family affected by the loss, but also the extended family of co-workers, neighbors and community.
■ But not many leaders, including those in healthcare, are prepared for the challenges that can face an organization when a staff member loses a child through an accident or illness.
Scenario

- Tom had found his 2 ½ year old daughter, Jennifer, face down in their swimming pool. She had crawled through a doggie door in the kitchen. Tom, an experienced Emergency Medical Technician, performed CPR on his daughter for 25 minutes until the paramedics arrived on the scene. He rode in the ambulance to the local hospital. His daughter was pronounced dead on arrival at the Emergency Department, where Tom’s wife Tammy was employed. Tammy had followed the ambulance to the hospital in her car. She initially choose not to enter the room or view the body once the doctors had pronounced Jennifer as dead.
Go To The Hospital

- Nothing communicates caring and commitment like being present during a time of crisis.
- Sometimes leaders are concerned about intruding on the personal space.
- The parent will never forget that you cared enough to be with them during this tragedy.
- There is not a phone call, text, email message, or even sending flowers that can communicate your commitment to the family more than being present.
What does the family need?

- Butler and others (2014) conducted a review of 15 original research studies related to parental experience of healthcare providers’ actions surrounding the death of their child.
  - 11 out 15 addressed staff attitude during some point during child’s death
  - Need for staff to overtly display a caring/compassionate attitude (highest ranked aspect of desired care by parents)
- Mullen and others (2015) discovered similar findings related to importance of compassionate, sensitive care that supports family’s wishes and meets needs
  - Repeatedly providing accurate information directly, in a clear and understandable manner
Several states, such as Iowa, require that criminal investigators examine the death scene for all cases of unexpected or sudden infant, toddler, or child deaths under the age of 6 years old (Hochstadt, 2006).

- A death scene may be assessed by a combination of police and medical personnel.
- This process may involve taking photographs, interviews and possibly video recordings.

According to Parris (2011) there is evidence that the way families experience events around the time of death will influence their grief.

The accurate and clear communication of information and the knowledge of the cultural and religious needs of the family are important in care.
Share Information in a Group Venue

- Ensure you get permission from the family to share information
- Explain to family the exact information that you will be communicating to staff members
  - *Ensure that you do not violate any HIPPA rules and protect the private information for the family*
  - *The HIPAA Privacy Rule protects the individually identifiable health information about a decedent for 50 years following the date of death of the individual.*
  - *Information relayed to staff and co-workers should be based on public facts that are known (Dyer, 2002).*
- Inform the staff of the family desires regarding contact via phone or visits to home.
- Keresztes (2006) states that it is the immediate manager’s responsibility to notify staff of the death, impending funeral services and the desires of the family.
Gather appropriate information to support decision making.

- Jeanne McGill identified 63 decisions that must be made at the time of death (Goforth, 2015)
- Some funeral homes will deduct costs or even donate services for an infant/child
- If there is a benefits expert at your organization, then ensure this person is available to answer questions for the family
- Families under stress can be in information overload and may need information repeated on multiple occasions to facilitate decision making
- Keresztes (2006) suggests that it is the manager’s responsibility in cooperation with human resources to ensure that the family is aware of insurance and other benefits
Connect the family to resources.

- Co-workers are often very eager to help
  - *Benkel and others (2009)*: main social support desired by the grieving person was from their network of close family, family of origin, relatives and friends

- Tasks such as helping to arrange transportation, deliver meals, and coordinate reservations for incoming family and friends can be very helpful to the grieving family

- Parents may be concerned about the impact of the incident on other children in the family
  - *Ensure that the family is aware of resources that are available in the community and any Employee Assistance Program to help them work through this difficult experience*

- Be patient, steadfast, and understanding as you help the family examine their options

- The greatest need for professional support may be close to the time of death and shortly thereafter (Benkel et. al, 2009)
  - *Provide some flexibility in work hours even time off to help worker cope with combined stressors of work and grief*
  - *Expect tears, possible mood swings and decreased work performance following the death (Dyer, 2002).*
Acknowledge the grief of the family and co-workers.

- Be supportive, but also allow each person to work their way through the painful grief process at their own pace.
- Employee assistance programs may be available within your organization that provide grief counseling services.
- A debriefing can also provide education regarding normal signs and symptoms of the grief process.
- “Grieving in the workplace, if not handled properly, can create a toxic situation” (Alan Goforth, 2015, p. 50).
  - “The Grief Recovery Institute surveyed 25,000 grieving workers and concluded that grief associated with the death of a loved one costs U.S. businesses $37.6 billion annually” (p. 50).
Attend the funeral.

- Butler and others (2014) found that parents have a strong need for follow-up care that may include the staffs’ presence at the child’s funeral.
- When these aspects of care are missing, parents reported feeling isolated and abandoned.
- By going through this grief and healing process, I learned the vital importance of therapeutic presence:
  - Being present helps you to discover what the family needs.
  - Being present helps you to understand what the family is experiencing.
  - Being present allows you and your organization to heal along with the family.
References


