Trauma-Focused CBT for Childhood Traumatic Grief

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Tasks of Childhood Bereavement

- Experience the deep pain associated with death.
- Accept the permanence of death (varies according to developmental level).
- Reminisce about the deceased person—good and bad.
- Incorporate important aspects of the deceased into own identity
- Convert the relationship from one of interaction to one of memory
- Commit to new relationships
- Regain healthy developmental trajectory

Wolfelt (1996); Worden (1996)
**“Typical” Childhood Grief**

- Children are able to engage in these tasks
- Emptiness, sadness, longing for the deceased, but without guilt, ↓ self-esteem, death preoccupation
- Intensity: intense “pangs” (sadness, longing) interspersed with ~normal functioning
- Duration: self-limited; diminishes over the course of several weeks-months

**Childhood Traumatic Grief**

- Similar terms: Maladaptive grief, complicated grief
- Child develops trauma symptoms and complicated grief symptoms after death of important attachment figure
- Trauma symptoms: PTSD intrusion, avoidance, maladaptive cognitions and emotions, hyperarousal
- Complicated grief symptoms: difficulty engaging in grief tasks: separation distress; social/identity disruption; ↑ anger, avoidance, and/or preoccupation with death
- Child is “stuck” on traumatic aspects of death and unable to reminisce without traumatic memories.

**Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)**

- Evidence-based treatment for traumatized children, adolescents and their parents/caregivers
- Short-term (12-20 sessions)
- Provided in parallel to child and parent, with several conjoint sessions for child and parent/caregiver
Who is TF-CBT For?

- Children 3-18 years with known trauma history and non-offending parent or caregiver
- Any traumas—single, multiple, complex
- Prominent trauma symptoms (PTSD, depression, anxiety, with/without behavioral problems)
- Parental/caretaker involvement is optimal but not required
- Settings: clinic, school, residential, home, inpatient, refugee, other
- Format: individual or group

Evidence That TF-CBT Works

- 21 RCT comparing TF-CBT to other conditions
- TF-CBT → greater improvement in PTSD, depression, anxiety, behavior problems compared to comparison or control conditions
- Parents participating in TF-CBT also experienced greater improvement compared to parents participating in comparison conditions

TF-CBT for Childhood Traumatic Grief

- CTG: trauma symptoms interfere/impinge on child’s ability to engage in typical grieving tasks
- Provide sequential trauma-focused and grief-focused interventions:
  - Trauma-focused components to resolve trauma symptoms
  - Grief-focused components to help child engage in typical tasks of grieving
TF-CBT Core Principles

- Components- and phase-based treatment
- Proportionality of phases
- Gradual exposure—not prolonged exposure—integrated into all TF-CBT components

Components-Based Treatment: PRACTICE

Phase-Based Treatment

- Psychoeducation
- Parenting Component
- Relaxation Skills STABILIZATION PHASE
- Affective regulation Skills
- Cognitive processing Skills
- Trauma narration and processing TN PHASE
- In vivo mastery of trauma reminders
- Conjoint child-parent sessions INTEGRATION PHASE
- Enhancing safety

Proportionality of TF-CBT Phases

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<th>Stabilization</th>
<th>Trauma Narrative</th>
<th>Integration</th>
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Psychoeducation

- Educate about trauma reminders and common reactions to the death/other traumas
- Provide information re: trauma and grief symptoms
- Identify child’s reminders/connections to symptoms:
  - Trauma: reminders of the traumatic death
  - Loss: reminders of losing the person
  - Change: reminders of how life has changed
- Validate the child’s and parent’s reactions.
- Provide hope for recovery.
Parenting Component

- Parents receive individual sessions for all PRACTICE components.
- Parenting skills to enhance child-parent interactions including:
  - Praise, effective attention, contingency reinforcement schedules
  - Help parent connect the child’s behavioral problems to child’s CTG symptoms

Relaxation Skills

- Reverse physiological arousal CTG effects via:
  - Focused breathing, mindfulness
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Exercise
  - Yoga
  - Songs, dance, blowing bubbles, reading, prayer, other relaxing activities
  - Use relaxation strategies when reminders occur
Affective Modulation Skills

• Identify and modulate upsetting affective states including:
• Problem solving
• Anger management
• Present focus
• Obtaining social support
• Positive distraction activities
• Use skills in relation to reminders
Cognitive Processing Skills

- Recognize connections among thoughts, feelings and behaviors
- Replace thoughts with more accurate/more helpful ones
- Child’s cognitive processing of personal trauma experiences typically occurs during trauma narration
- Free TF-CBT Triangle of Life app available at Google+ and Apple Store

Trauma Narration & Processing

- Gradually develop a detailed narrative of child’s personal traumatic grief experiences.
- Process using cognitive strategies learned earlier (changing inaccurate/unhelpful thoughts about the traumatic death).
- Share with parent during individual parent sessions as child is developing TN
In Vivo Mastery of Trauma Reminders

- Only for ongoing avoidance of generalized reminders (e.g., if child refuses to ride in cars after witnessing parent’s death in car accident)
- Develop fear hierarchy, gradually master increasingly feared stimuli
- May start during stabilization phase—takes several weeks

Conjoint Parent-Child Sessions

- Child shares trauma narrative and processing directly with parent during conjoint session
- Share their new cognitions about CTG
- May also develop a family safety plan (e.g., who will take care of me if you die, etc.); improve general communication; or build other skills

Enhancing Safety and Future Development

- Safety plans continued for individual situations
- Social skills, problem solving, drug refusal, etc.
- Additional skills as individual child/family need
TF-CBT Grief-Focused Components

- Grief psychoeducation
- What I miss and don’t miss
- Preserving positive memories
- Redefining the relationship and Committing to present relationships
- Treatment closure

Grief Psychoeducation

- Assist the child in talking about death (start bereavement tasks after resolution of trauma reminders)
- Correct misconceptions about death, particularly disaster-related deaths, which may pose special issues (e.g., bodies not recovered, mutilation, etc.)
- Cultural issues critical with CTG, must include these considerations

Grieving the Loss (“What I Miss”)

- Naming what has been lost with the death
- May accomplish this in many ways
- One way is through the use of a name anagram:
  Made cakes with me
  Always in my heart
  Ran cross country races
  Yellow was her favorite color
Resolving Ambivalent Feelings
(“What I Don’t Miss”)

- May be because of conflict in the relationship (e.g., abuse, normal parent-child conflict, unresolved anger)
- May be due to stigma or shame over the way the person died (e.g., drug OD, drunk driving, suicide, AIDS)
- May be because of anger at “unnecessary death” (e.g., didn’t get medical care, “was a hero for others, didn’t think of me”)
- Write an imagined letter to/from deceased

Preserving Positive Memories

- Once child has resolved trauma issues and ambivalence, can tolerate memories and start to reminisce more fully.
- Use family, siblings, friends of deceased.
- Make something enduring to preserve positive memories (collage, video, etc.).
- After disasters mementos may be lost: computer technology, narratives and/or friends can help fill in these gaps.
- Child may want to have another memorial service.

Converting the Relationship From Interaction to Memory

- Helping the child convert the relationship from one of interaction to one of memory
- Use the past tense when referring to the deceased; encourage the parent to do so and help the child to do so.
- Balloon exercise
- Identify what the child still has and what the child must let go of.
Committing to Present Relationships

• Challenges for the child in committing to present relationships
• Challenges for the parent in committing to present relationships
• How to assist the child and parent in moving forward towards present and future relationships

Treatment Closure Issues

• Preparing for future trauma and loss reminders: perpetual calendar
• Making meaning of traumatic grief: What would you tell other children; how do you think you have changed; what have you learned from this person’s death?
• Death is different from other endings: treatment closure issues for CTG.

Special CTG Issues for Community Disasters

• Post-disaster: at what point does it become clear that missing people are dead?
• Therapists who are also traumatized—how can they provide optimal care to children and families and also care for themselves?
• Making a future family disaster preparedness plan becomes more complicated if your family member died.
• Educating teachers/classmates how to optimally interact with children with CTG
TF-CBT Research for Traumatic Grief

Effectiveness studies
Cohen, Mannarino & Staron (2006)
   All showed positive outcomes for PTSD and CTG

Randomized Controlled Trials
Whetten et al (in development)
Brown, Goodman, Cohen & Mannarino
   (unpublished manuscript)

Summary

• CTG is a condition in which children are “stuck” on the traumatic aspects of a person’s death and cannot progress through the typical bereavement tasks.
• Trauma-focused PRACTICE components (8 sessions)
  Grief focused components (4 sessions)
• Sequential treatment using trauma- and grief-focused interventions shows preliminary promise.

TF-CBT Web

www.musc.edu/tfcbt2

TF-CBT Web is a web-based, distance education training course for learning Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT).
CTGWeb is a follow-up course that teaches how to apply TF-CBT to cases of child traumatic grief. CTGWeb is offered free of charge.

CTGWeb was launched on September 1, 2008.

TF-CBT National Therapist Certification

https://tfcbt.org
- Licensed therapists eligible for 5 year certification
- TF-CBTWeb, live 2 day training, 12 consultation calls, 3 completed cases with standardized assessment instrument

Resources
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org
- TF-CBTWeb2.0: www.musc.edu/tfcbt2
- CTGWeb: www.musc.edu/ctg
- Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents: www.guilford.com/p/cohen
- Trauma-Focused CBT for Children and Adolescents: Treatment Applications www.guilford.com/p/cohen2
Maya Angelou:

“The world is changed one child at a time”.

Thank you for all you do to help children and families!