Forgotten Mourners: Grandparents & Adult Siblings

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Presentation Objectives

• Explore what we know from the research on the impact of grandparents who experience the loss of an infant/grandchild
• Gain knowledge on ways to support extended family members when there is a perinatal loss in their family.
• Identify models of in-person and internet grandparent bereavement support groups

Stating the Obvious

• We are aware of many different spiritual, ethic and individual traditions around loss.

• It is the responsibility of staff to assess where each person is in their beliefs. These principles may fit many but we need to consider the individual as you care for families.

• This presentation will cover our work where the majority are families with a spiritual belief of a continued bond with a deceased baby
How Many

• 160,000 grandparents experience the death of a grandchild each year

• 34,000 are child and infant death

• 72% under one year of age (Youngblut, Brooten, et al, 2015)

• Currently little information on adult siblings

Experience Multiple Losses

• Loss of grandchild/niece or nephew

• Cannot fix adult child’s/siblings pain

• Carry their own grief
What does the literature tell us?

• Is their grief legitimate?
  • Disenfranchised
  • Silenced
• Forgotten by others (O’Leary, et al. 2017)
• Helpless in supporting the bereaved parents
• Expressing their own grief may be a burden
• Grandparents risk for health issues (Youngblut, et al., 2015)

The Bereaved Parents Perception

• Can feel responsible for their parents’ sadness
• May hold back information
• Conflict in grandparents not talking about the deceased baby

Themes Discussed in Groups

• Hearing the news
• Boundaries
• Keeping the memory alive
• Finding support for self
• Coping with milestones
• Changed Relationship

What do Bereaved Parents Want

• Acknowledge the deceased child as part of the family
• Keep pictures of deceased child visible in the home just as other grandchildren
• Appreciate the deceased child as a continued family member in the pregnancy that follows
Strategies to Help without Burdening Parent

- Identify resources
- Handouts at hospital
- Grandparent support group
- Self care

One Grandfather’s Quote

“You may feel helpless but you’re not hopeless”
• Lighting a candle at family gatherings
• Memorial walks
• Donations:
  - Toys for Tots
  - Volunteering at Ronald McDonald
• Starting a non-profit
  - To help pay medical expenses
  - To help pay mortgage

References

• O’Leary, Parker, & Wimmer, (2017). Bereaved Grandparents: We didn’t know our Part. *Journal of Community Medicine & Public Health C*
• Resources for Grandparents
  - https://www.compassionatefriends.org/product/the-grief-of-grandparents/
  - http://www.healingheart.net/articles/grandparents_grief.html