



BACKGROUND

Loss and change are a normal and inevitable part of all our lives but how we experience and cope with grief, and whether experiencing traumatic events leads to emotional and behavioural difficulties, is dependent on a range of factors such as resilience levels and the type and frequency of the traumatic event.

Grief is widely accepted to occur after obviously traumatic events such as bereavement, serious accidents or incidents and parental separation or divorce. All are expected to impact significantly on those who experience them. Other events such as the loss of a pet, parental change or loss of job, moving home, area or school are more subtle but can create '*disenfranchised grief*' (Doka, 1989). While they are not always recognised as traumatic or grief inducing, these events can produce similar reactions and impact particularly significantly upon children. Research also suggests that while the children and young people who experience certain events categorise them as traumatic, adults sometimes don't. Consequently, the effects of trauma on children are consistently under reported. In addition, where there is acknowledgement of a traumatic event, adults may be conscious of the immediate impact but less aware of lasting effects (O'Connor and Russell, 2004).

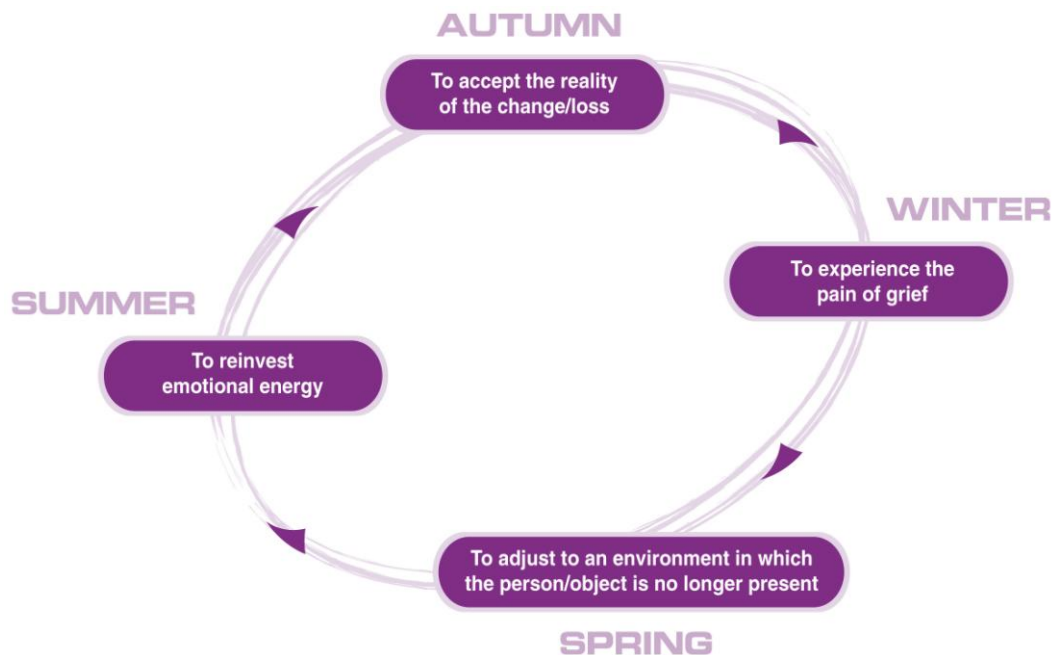
Research suggests that children and young people who report a high level of traumatic events also report emotional and behavioural difficulties; although not all children experience lasting effects. Protective factors, such as making and maintaining positive relationships, availability of supportive adults and personal awareness all help to develop resilience and decrease the effects of trauma. Conversely, risk factors are thought to be cumulative and research suggests that experiencing many different types of trauma increases the risk of the development of emotional and behavioural difficulties (O'Connor and Russell, 2004). These difficulties can be physical or psychological and can manifest, for example, as anxiety, anger, non-cooperation, consistent complaints of feeling unwell or lying. Reactions can also be significantly delayed and appear to be unconnected to current circumstances or not perceived as linked to earlier traumatic events. The majority of children and young people recover relatively quickly but there are a significant number who continue to live with the effects of trauma (O'Connor and Russell, 2004).

WHAT IS SEASONS FOR GROWTH?

Originating in Australia, Seasons for Growth is a grief education programme, which is designed to support children and young people in developing ways of coping with grief, loss and change. Based on Worden's (1992) Tasks of Grief and linked to the changing seasons, the programme uses activities such as brainstorming, role play, storytelling and discussion to develop resilience and support children and young people in processing their grief. Through these activities, participants are supported to understand that change is normal, inevitable and happens in every family. They learn that although these changes may occur in a variety of ways and people experience them differently, the feelings aroused are very similar. In

addition, feelings are acknowledged as a normal part of the grieving process and each individual is encouraged to explore ways of understanding and managing their feelings and moving forward.

Worden's Tasks of Grief and the Seasons



Seasons for Growth is a small group (4-8 participants) programme consisting of 8 sessions, (two for each season) which last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes each. At week 9 there is a 'celebration' followed by two 'reconnector' sessions later in the year. Sessions usually happen during the school day and are facilitated by two trained adults called Companions. The programme consists of five levels with approximate ages, which are Level 1 – ages 6 – 8; Level 2 – ages 9 – 10; Level 3 – ages 11 – 12; Level 4 – ages 13 – 15 and Level 5 – ages 16 – 18.

In terms of evaluation of impact, a report was commissioned in 2011, which involved 334 children in 57 Seasons for Growth programmes across Australia, Scotland and New Zealand. Participating children reported that, through Seasons for Growth, they had learned that it's OK to express feelings, whether that's anger or sadness; change doesn't always equate with bad things happening and change occurs in every family. Similarly, parents felt children had benefited from opportunities to express themselves in a safe environment and learning that they were not alone; Companions felt that the programme effectively supported children through loss, change and grief by increasing awareness of support systems and building skills and understanding to develop resilience (Newell and Moss, 2011).

SEASONS FOR GROWTH IN MORAY

Twenty-four Companions have been trained in Moray since 2011 and of those, 17 have already been involved in running programmes. To date (September 2013) 15 programmes, involving 94 children, have been run and completed across 6 ASGs (Buckie, Elgin High, Elgin Academy, Forres, Lossiemouth and Milnes). All of these have been delivered in primary schools and the majority have been at level 2 (11) with 2 each at levels 1 and 3.

Currently, Seasons for Growth is offered to children and young people who are known to have experienced and been significantly affected by loss or change. The initial discussions usually take place between the Companions running the programme and the Head Teacher. When deciding on groups it is important that there is not too big an age gap between participants as the chosen level has to be appropriate for all group members. Other factors, such as maturity, should also be taken into account. In terms of commitment, it is preferable to have sessions on the same day and time each week. Therefore, this requires a significant commitment from the school involved as the programme itself runs for eight weeks. The Celebration is on the ninth week and two re-connectors approximately take place two and four months after the main sessions have ended. Additionally, the timing of any breaks is essential as the programme must run for at least five sessions before a break (because group members cannot be left exploring their grief in 'winter'). Therefore, in Moray, programmes run twice a year starting in September and then in January/February.

FURTHER INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Further information about Seasons for Growth is available at:

<http://www.seasonsforgrowth.org.uk>

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