
Contemporary Theories of Grief and loss for children and families

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‘No family in western society expects to bury a child’ *(Portnoy & Di Stubbs)*

(Portnoy & Di Stubbs, IN Oxford Textbook of Palliative Care for Children, 2012. p.155)

GROWING A COMMUNITY OF CARE



IMPACT OF LIVING WITH A LIFE-LIMITING CONDITION

- Loss is not only associate with death – pre bereavement
- Multiple losses: at diagnosis, on deterioration, at times of uncertainty
- Living with ‘chronic sorrow’
- Personal Growth
- Adapting to life-limiting illness
 - Demands of the illness
 - Impact of illness
 - Personality of child/family & ways of communication

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

- Profoundly traumatic
- No two grieve the same way
- Each bereavement journey is unique
- Death may have been anticipated – *‘shocked but maybe not surprised’*
- Secondary losses
 - Loss of support structures
 - Financial
 - Status/role (parent to an only child who dies)

THEORIES OF GRIEF AND LOSS

Traditional theories – focus on ‘coming to terms with loss’, closure, letting go

Contemporary theories – move away from stages of grief, to finding ways to incorporate a new relationship with the deceased child in the bereaved person’s life, recognise that grief is a natural process

- Dual process (Stroebe & Schut)
- Continuing Bonds (Klass et al)

What has changed....

THE 5 STAGES OF GRIEF



Denial



Anger



Bargaining



Depression



Acceptance



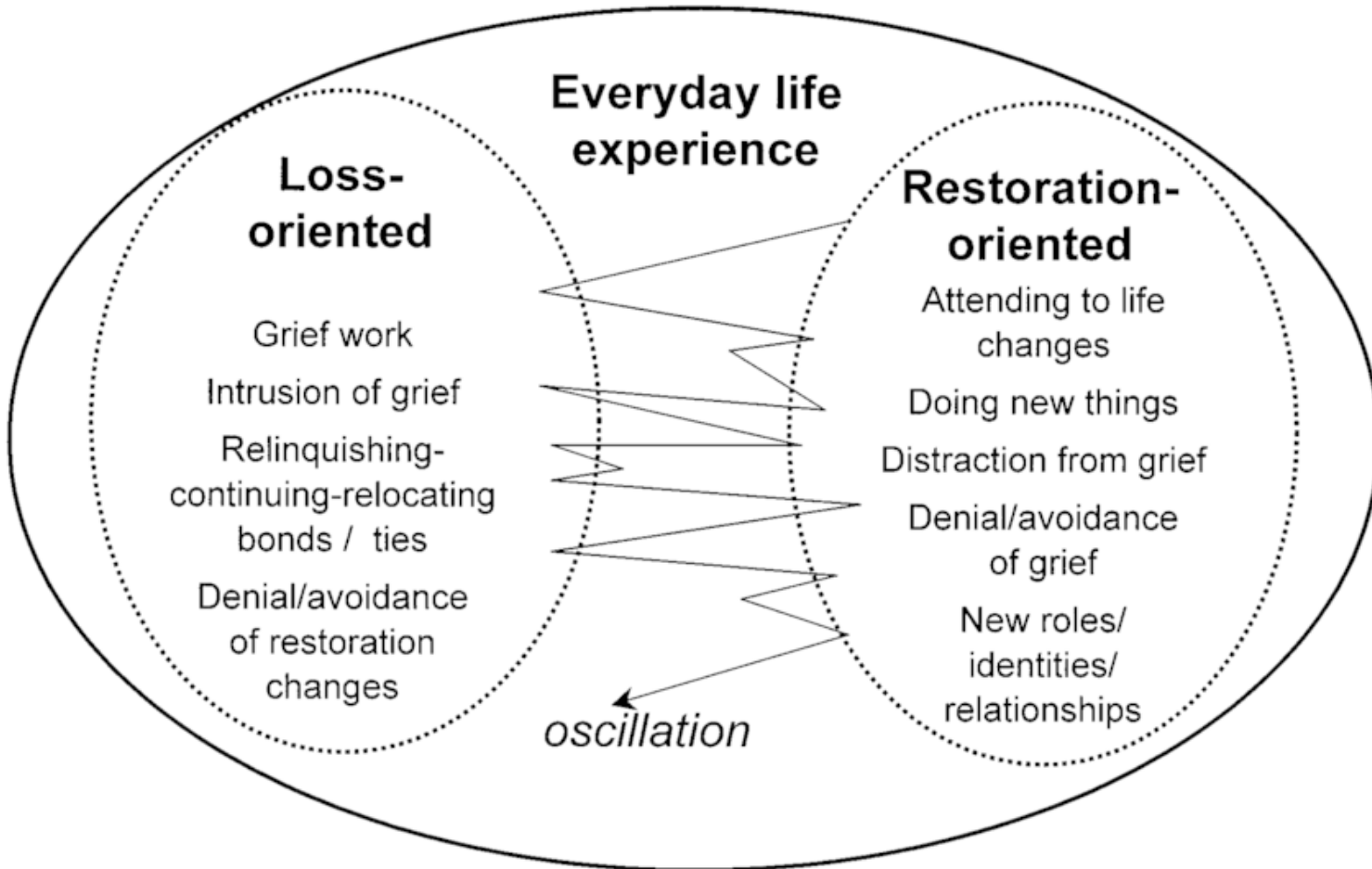
Simpsons stages of grief

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohrjV8hBmC0>



Newer thinking...

DUAL PROCESS



Continuing Bonds

- Developed from Bowlby's attachment theory
- Memories and feelings develop in the first years after death
- Rather than 'letting go', the meaning of loss is renegotiated and the relationship continues
- Bond is not static, evolves and connection remains

(Brown,2007)



CONTINUING BONDS

Klass and Silverman (1996) believed that the area of continuing bonds had been undervalued in theoretical and clinical work.

The original belief was that humans struggle to maintain a connection to the person.

They suggested a stage of continuing attachment not detachment. Remaining connected appeared to facilitate resolution of grief. These connections provided solace and comfort and eased the transition from past to present.

The relationship with the deceased has changed and not ended.

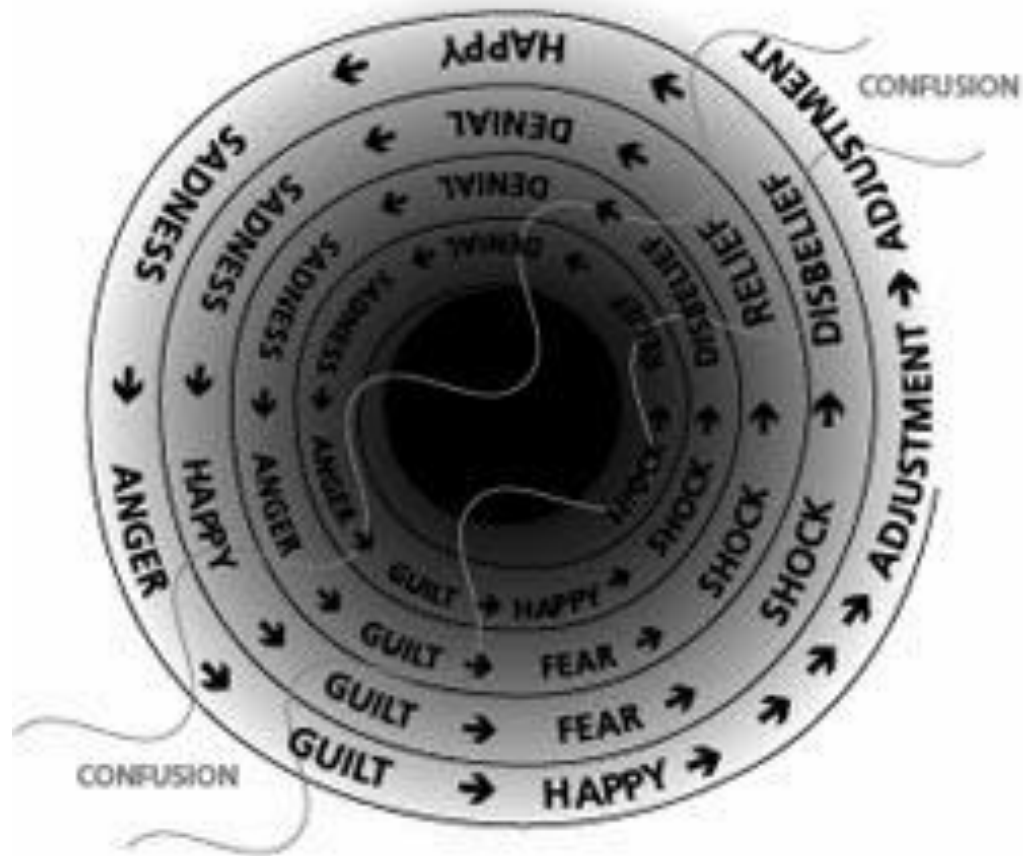
Attachment Theory

These bonds are seen as the underlying cause of bereavement reactions



Spiral of Grief

(Shelley Gilbert)



Tonkin theory of growing our world around grief (2008)

- Expectation

Before loss



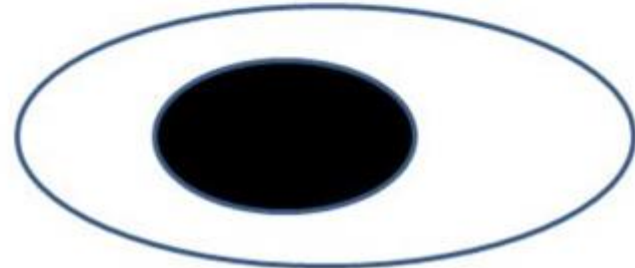
Loss



Eventually



- Reality

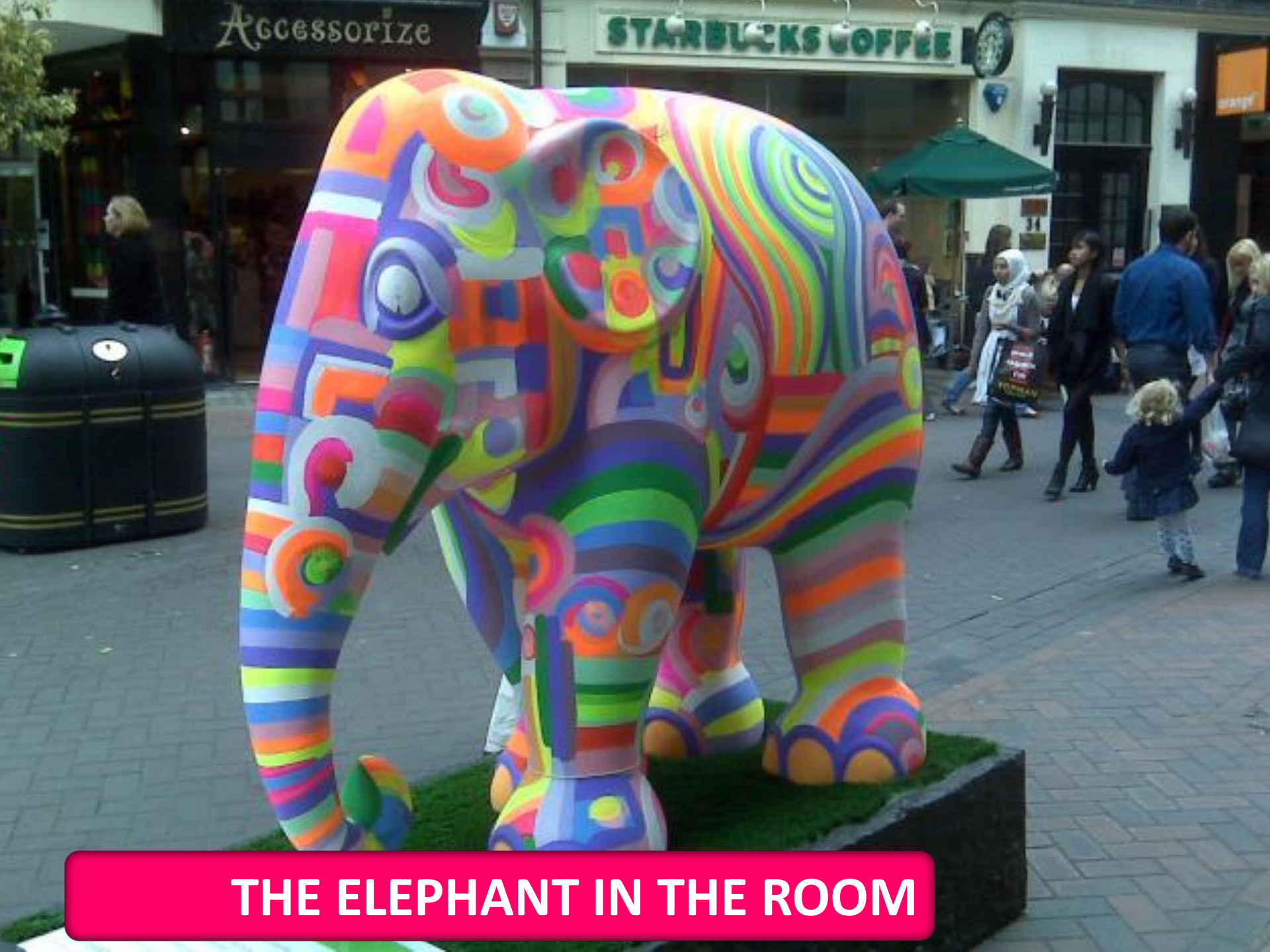


What helps grieving families?

- Open communication
- Expression of feelings and thoughts of grief
- Information about what has happened and why
- Remembering the whole person who has died
- Meeting and talking to others who have been bereaved

Ways To Help Children

- Have books available that discuss the life cycle
- Use art materials, draw, paint
- Be prepared for questions
- Worry lists, meddles and puzzles



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Resources

- Irish Hospice Foundation – bereavement leaflets
<http://hospicefoundation.ie/bereavement/bereavement-leaflets/>
 - Understanding Grief
 - Grieving the death of a child
 - The grieving family
 - Children’s grief
 - Adolescent grief
- Irish Child Bereavement Network <http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/>
- Anam Cara <http://anamcara.ie/>
- Tusla <https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/parenting-information/parenting-information-fsa/>
- Barnardos <https://www.barnardos.ie/resources/bereavement>
- Grief encounter <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

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