

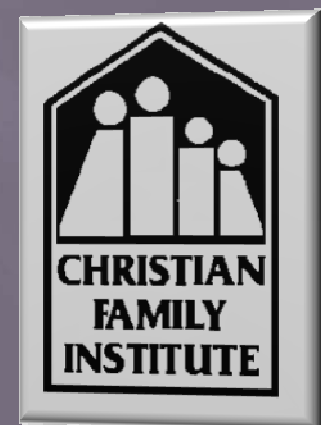
GRIEVING THE LOSS OF AN INFANT

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Why Infant Loss is Unique

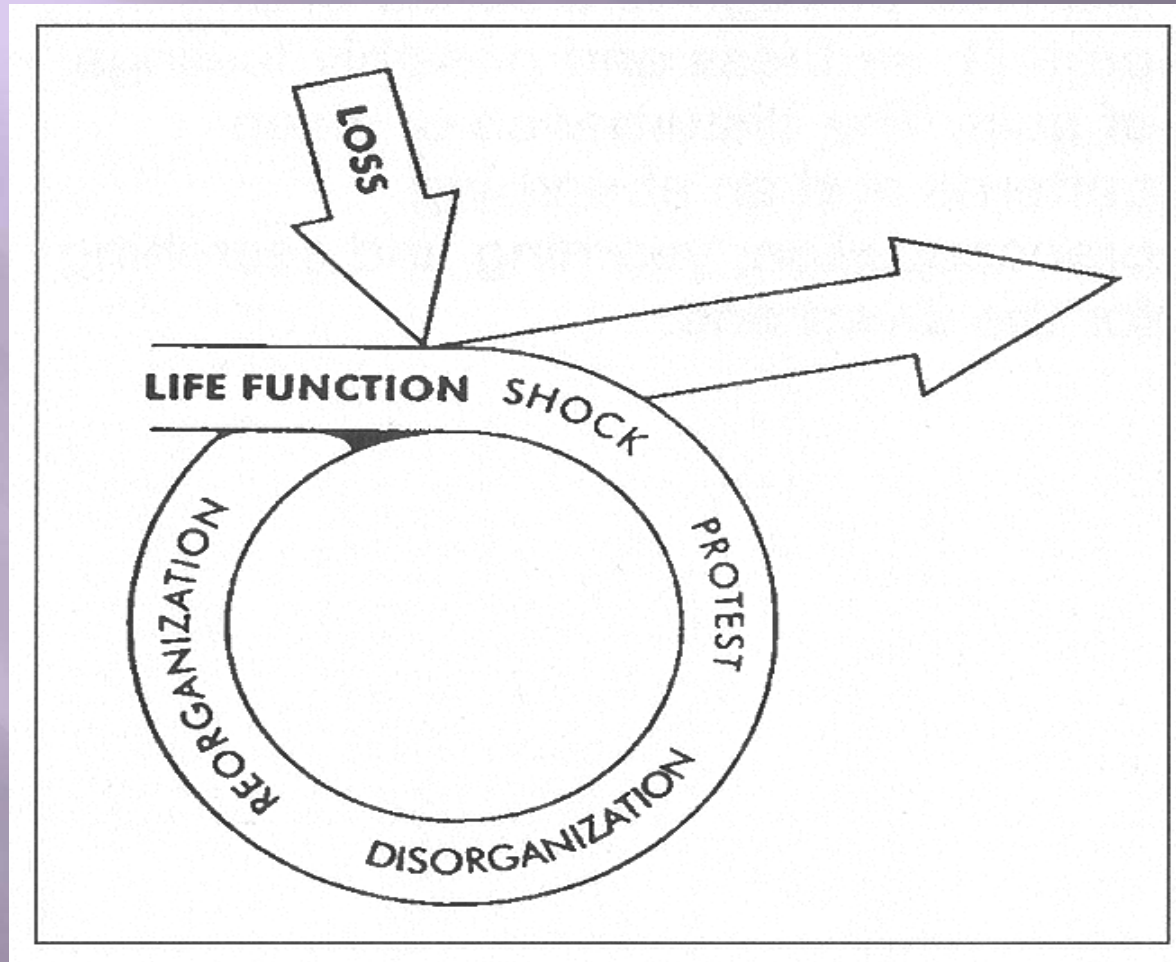
- ▣ Unnatural life event
- ▣ Expectations are very high and positive when expecting a baby
- ▣ Babies are the most vulnerable dependant human beings, this contributes to high blame and guilt.
- ▣ Our society has high expectations of the mother - drink & eat the right thing, do right by your baby

Grief is a Process

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross described 5 stages of grief we experience after a loss:

- ▣ Denial ~ the loss did not happen
- ▣ Anger ~ the loss shouldn't have happened
- ▣ Bargaining ~ how can we prevent the loss?
- ▣ Depression ~ the full impact of the loss overwhelms us
- ▣ Acceptance ~ we accept the loss and resume our lives

The Grief Wheel



The Grief Wheel

- Shock ~ denial, numbness, disbelief
- Protest ~ anger, guilt, sadness
- Disorganization ~ despair, anxiety, confusion, depression
- Reorganization ~ the return of balance and full functioning, often with changed values



Things to Keep in Mind

- ▣ No matter the loss, people experience grief differently
- ▣ The stages are not always successive, some bounce around in different stages

The affect on grief from infant loss:

- ▣ **CONFUSION** will likely be pervasive throughout the process:

Did this really happen?

How did my baby die?

What was God thinking?

Why aren't people talking to me?

How can I still be a parent to a child that is gone?

How can I be happy for others having babies when mine is gone?

Unique Challenges of Infant Loss

- **Mothers are solely responsible for the baby.**
Moms thoughts/behavior during pregnancy: "I was not excited about this baby"
Not taking vitamins everyday etc.
- **Circumstances of the birth and death:**
Stillborn
Mothers body has prepared for a baby and the baby's room
loss of a twin
- **Profoundly challenges beliefs about God**
Why would God allow me to get pregnant if He was just going to allow my baby to die?
Can I trust Him?
How could it be God's will for a baby to die?
- **Sense of self is now in confusion**
I am a parent but I am not parenting
- **Couple relationship may be less secure**
Look at stages of grief again
mutual isolation
It is hard to reach out when hurting
Grief is not the same, couples can get upset with each other for doing different

Practical issues for therapy

Helpful issues to address with the client:

- ▣ Encourage them to honor the memory of their child
- ▣ Encourage them to be informed of the medical issues involved in the loss
- ▣ Help them prepare for anniversary events and holidays
- ▣ Encourage them to tell friends and family what they need

Practical issues for therapy

- ▣ Encourage realistic expectations
- ▣ Make sure the couple has realistic expectations of each other
- ▣ Talk to them about how they will describe their family in the future

As the therapist, remember this will be a learning process for you too

Resources

- ▣ MEND group (Mothers Enduring Infant Loss) group (mend.com)
- ▣ For friends and family members:
Babysteps.com the Bereavement Resource Room has a great list of Do's and Dont's