Final Reflection

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Prior to this course, my view of what encapsulated grief and loss was very narrowly defined. I had previously only considered grief to be a reaction that arises following the death of a loved one. However, through this course, I have learned that individuals experience an array of symbolic and tangible losses throughout their lives that lead to grief responses (Walsh, 2021). These losses can arise due to life experiences such as accidents, chronic illnesses, divorce and drug abuse, among others (Walsh, 2021). However, since grief is often only viewed through the lens of bereavement, the difficult losses that children experience often go unacknowledged and resulting maladaptive behavior is often misinterpreted (Walsh, 2021). This insight will have significant implications for me as future Child Life Specialist. For instance, it will help me be more attuned to diverse experiences that can lead to grief, recognize its potential signs, and validate children and families' experiences of loss to promote resilience and coping.

The group sessions also helped provide me with insights, specifically about my own beliefs and potential biases. For instance, during my group's sessions on 'Divorce and Separation' and 'Beliefs and Customs,' I began to better see how my religious views shape the way I see the world and others' situations. This is not a unique experience to me as "spirituality and religion are meaningful influences in peoples' lives, particularly in coping with death and loss" (Walsh, 2021, p.132). However, I recognize that the spirituality and religious practices of the individuals I encounter in my future work will often look different than my own. For instance, in reviewing the pages stating the practices and beliefs of different world religions from the Weymont & Rae (2006) text, I realized that even Christian beliefs and practices can look far different depending on denomination. Thus, I recognize that I need to continue to work on

developing cultural humility and openness when supporting children and families, particularly those from different spiritual backgrounds.

Additionally, class readings have added to my knowledge of the emotional impact of providing child life services. Since Child Life Specialists work with children and families in the healthcare setting, they are exposed to the multitude of losses that those they help endure. This can range from assisting patients and families through experiences including loss of normalcy to experiences of loss of life. Throughout these helping experiences Child Life Specialists are tasked with modulating their emotional reactions to sometimes traumatic losses which enhances the emotional burden associated with their work (Shuck, Shuck, & Reio, 2018). Additionally, due to their proximity to loss, Child Life Specialists risk internalizing patient and family loss experiences (Fisackerly et. al., 2016). This, in turn, can result in burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue (Fisackerly et. al., 2016).

Recognizing the emotional challenges that likely await me as a future Child Life Specialists, highlights the importance of being proactive in creating an effective self-care plan. Through course readings, I have learned that debriefing with colleagues after emotionally heightened experiences, such as a patient's death, reduces the risk for professional burnout (Fisackerly et. al., 2016). Thus, I plan to ensure that the future organization I work for either already has a system in place to ensure their CCLSs have the opportunity to debrief or, at the very least, are open to one. Also, I plan to be intentional in learning about the organizational climate of child life teams I interview with as this can make a significant difference in the emotional labor associated with being a Child Life Specialist. However, I also recognize that I have a responsibility to engage in personal self-care strategies that extend beyond my workplace

to prevent personal stress from boiling over into my work life and vice versa (Walsh, 2021). Thus, I also plan to protect myself from burnout by engaging in well-known self-care strategies such as taking time off when needed, spending time with loved ones, and doing the things that bring me joy, such as journalling and praying.

References

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