



## Focus on Module 5:

### The Impact of Loss and Grief on Child Mental Health

**Module 5** focuses on the central role of loss and grief in foster care, adoption or guardianship and how loss and grief impacts the mental health of children. Below are tips for using a few strategies from this module in your day to day practice.

#### Reflection on Loss

Children experience profound loss; from loss of family, pets, friends, and even the sights, sounds and smells that are familiar and comforting.



**Module 5, Lesson 1** includes a “Loss Exercise”. Have staff complete the exercise and then discuss as a group answers to the following questions:

- How does it feel to have to choose who or what to leave behind?
- How does it feel to have little choice?



- Can you relate your feelings to those of children or youth on your caseload?
- How does this understanding inform your practice?

#### Ambiguous Loss & Disenfranchised Grief

These are two concepts introduced in **Lesson 1** that explain some barriers to resolving losses.

**Ambiguous losses** do not have finality – although children no longer live with past attachment figures, these people continue to exist. Often children have ambivalent feelings about the separation, including anger, sadness, guilt, and rejection.





**Disenfranchised grief** happens when the loss is not publicly acknowledged, mourned, or supported. Children and youth often don't understand why the loss occurred or if they did something to cause it. Many of their behaviors may be symptoms of grief.



**Think of a loss** you or someone you have worked with experienced that is ambiguous or characterized by disenfranchised grief. What emotional and behavioral symptoms were evident and what strategies helped with resolution?

### Maintaining Connections and Openness



**Helping children and youth keep in contact** with people who have been important to them, when safe, can reduce the severity of a child's losses and mitigate symptoms of grief. This helps them feel they matter! Important points to remember are:

- Openness of information and contact with birth family members exists along a continuum from completely closed to fully open. Contact can be through letters, phone calls, or visits and may vary in frequency.
- You can help parents redefine family and become more open to helping their children preserve relationships with those significant people in their lives - a special foster parent, family member, or mentor.
- You may need to model for parents and other professionals the importance and value of maintaining these connections as some may have a negative bias toward the idea of children maintaining connections with birth family members.

## NTI Training Improved Competence

*"The training improved my knowledge and competence. I have a good working relationship with mental health providers, but now will be able to work with them on a different level with the info learned in the training."*

-NTI user

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