



# School Children (aged 10 to 13) & Their Understanding of “Major Change or Losses in Life” and How They Communicate with their Parents and Teachers to Improve Coping and Life Skills. (Proof of Concept Study - Calgary)

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## Question

### Students not exposed to major loss:

Their understanding of change, major loss including death; to whom and how they communicate and what skills they possess and are they aware of any supports?

## Hypothesis

- This study will explore children’s understanding of change or losses and how to create opportunities of learning. In the future developing necessary tools that can be used in educating Life-Skills. There appear to be gaps in knowledge, which will allow investigators to create necessary tools for use in the class room, in a larger scale within the school curriculum.

## Project Overview

- Ethics approval from CHREB & CBE
- Approach schools and share information regards the study
- Informed consent (participating students, teachers & parents)
- Semi-structured interview guide (students, teachers and parents)
- Individual interviews recorded (students, teachers & parents)
- Transcribe the recorded interview
- Code words relevant to hypothesis & question
- Data analysis & descriptive statistics

## Participation

**Students:** Following informed consent from student, parent an interview was held using a semi-structured interview guide and the interview was recorded. Professional transcription along with coding of words completed to express descriptive statistics

**Parents & Teachers (Adults):** Following informed consent, parent or teacher was interviewed with a semi-structured interview guide and the interview was recorded. Professional transcription along with coding of words to express descriptive statistics

## Students (Common themes)

### Loss of Object:

Losing something I am not attached to does not make me sad

### Loss of Person:

Lost a friend who moved... sad but not demoralized

### Talking about Loss:

Not all parents or teachers are comfortable

### Experience with Death:

Witnessed sadness of parents at grandpa’s death

### Outcomes of Loss:

Will eventually get over it “Move on”

### Personal coping:

Talk to friends, family, be calm, cry, and listen to music....

### Age: 10 -13 is the right age to address, have strong imagination

## Parents (Common themes)

### Approaching the topic of Death:

Do not always have a plan in place for talking about death

Use the life cycle explanation or loss of a pet....

Depends on the strength of the family

### Coping with Loss within Individual families:

Varies with personalities of children & past history of loss

Use of love and touch when approaching the subject of death

Family unit is key; stories, books may help...

### Talking about Loss:

Timing is important... need enough time

Reflection & dialogue (Briefing & debriefing)

Honest/ open communication

Age appropriate conversation

## Teachers (common themes)

### Teacher a sounding board:

Appropriate when student approaches teacher to talk about loss

Listen & be aware of family wishes

Non-judgmental, help the student reflect & clarify the concerns

Need to recognize differing values & beliefs of parents & student

### Curriculum:

Approach is age related

Concepts such as resiliency & healthy relationships

Class discussions serve different purpose than one on one

Religious & cultural values may impact on the conversation

## Discussion

In most developed countries, elementary school onward the curriculum seem to have “major losses and coping” as part of Life-Skills. However literature search had shown sporadic publications on this topic for students who are not exposed to major losses. Children who are exposed to loss, illness or death, publications & tools exist.

The purpose of this study was to explore the understanding of school children of different ages in relation to major losses including death and their coping skills. At present children aged 10 to 16 seem to talk to their friends, family and less likely with teachers.

The study was conducted at the Calgary French & International School (CFIS), the results are perspective of the school and further studies in schools with different socioeconomic, ethnic and geographical catchments is reasonable.

Most importantly, future studies to note whether existing methods of grief and bereavement are useful in educating “unexposed” children in class room or newer material are required for teachers. It appears “Sex Education” seem to have beneficial learning and similarly “major Losses including Death” may allow resilience and improved skills for children.

In the future studies may include theories like “Attachment, Social Learning, Life Cycle, Cognitive Stage, Moral Development and Psychosexual theory of development”.



## Conclusion

- Students, teachers and parents echoed in our study that students aged 10 and above can benefit from age appropriate educational interventions at school on topic of “Major Losses” including death.
- Major losses are inevitable in life and require coping skills to reduce grief. Teachers and parents require age appropriate, good educational, conversational and practical material to implement the curriculum in Life Skills program.
- Our present understanding of “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” and inability to cope have physical and mental consequences. Early education to cope with such stress may benefit students & community as part of Public Health & Education.

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