ESSENTIAL AND BENEFICIAL ELEMENTS OF SCHOOL BASED

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR GRIEVING STUDENTS.

by

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

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Essential and Beneficial Elements of School Based Intervention Programs for Grieving
Students
(Title)

School Counseling K-12_____   Scott Orme, Ph.D.   May, 2001_____47_____
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There are volumes of existing literature which discuss various grief interventions for use in schools. The feelings and ideas of researchers and grief specialists are very important and valuable for individuals, such as school counselors, who work with students. However, the existing literature does appear to be lacking in the amount of work done that aims to discover what the students themselves feel and think regarding grief interventions.

The purpose of the present study was to determine students' and counselors' perceptions of the essential and beneficial elements of school based intervention programs for grieving students in schools (K-12). A survey was completed by 100 students and 44 professional school counselors. Subjects were asked to answer questions related to grief interventions, supportive comments, and other related topics.

Results of the present study showed that school counselors rated all of the given grief intervention services as more beneficial than did students. Also, on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being "most helpful") students gave their school a helpfulness rating of 5.72 while counselors reported a much higher mean of 8.03.

The differences between the two groups of subjects will be discussed in regards to intervention services and supportive comments/actions preferred, as well as possible explanations for the results. Suggestions for future research in this area complete this thesis.

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study.

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Chapter I

Introduction

There have been many studies (Thompson, 1990; Naierman, 1997; McGlauflin, 1998; Budzinski, 1998) that have reported on the importance of grief intervention programs in schools. The responsibility of aiding children and adolescents in the process of grieving is no longer placed only on the shoulders of the family. As well as providing a healthy educational environment for students, schools should be expected to look after the emotional well being of the students. As Budzinski stated, "grief and loss are inevitable aspects of life. Assisting a child or adolescent through the grieving process is a task that school counselors are responsible for" (1998, p.6). Naierman (1997) explained that teachers, administrators, school counselors, and school nurses play a vital role in helping students understand and survive the grieving experience, since they spend so much time with them. Thompson (1990) noted that students often take clues as to how to react from the adults around them more than from the event itself. It is vitally important that educators, counselors, and other support personnel process the emotional needs of their grieving students.

Although most school counselors and teachers are concerned for their grieving students and want to aid them, it is often difficult to know exactly how to give the students support. According to a study completed by Labi and associates (1999), George Bonanno (assistant professor of psychology at the Catholic University of America) studied a group of bereaved individuals for twenty-five months. Mr. Bonanno found that those who focused on their pain, either by talking about it or displaying it in their facial expressions, tended to have more trouble sleeping and maintaining their everyday

functions. Despite Bonanno's study, it is generally agreed upon that providing some sort of assistance for grieving individuals is healthier than expecting them to keep a stiff upper lip. Gard (2000) stated that, "people who don't express their feelings never really heal. Long-term denial of the death and the avoidance of grief can later surface as more severe problems" (p. 28). Although grieving individuals should not be pushed and hurried through the grieving experience, it is important that others provide the needed emotional support. Carl explained that although "...the grieving process is undoubtedly a time of great need when people reach out to those around them...children and adolescents are not as likely to ask for assistance in gaining emotional stability" (1998, p. 6).

Exactly what each student needs and what form of support is the most beneficial for grieving students is an important and interesting question for counselors and researchers to examine. Thompson (1990) noted that counselors must identify and help resolve adolescents' sense of powerlessness, as well as allow expression of feelings such as sorrow, hostility, and guilt. In a similar article, McGlauflin (1998) reported that counselors and other school personnel need to be knowledgeable about the grief process, be open to the grief process, and integrate the grief process into the daily operations of a school.

Many studies (Freeman and Ward, 1998; Goldberg and Leyden, 1998; Brock, 1998; Feigal, 1991) have reported the opinions and viewpoints of researchers and school personnel on the topic of grief interventions. These findings and viewpoints are undeniably important and helpful to anyone involved with grief interventions. However, one should also be concerned with the feelings and opinions of those whom the grief interventions are targeted at - the bereaved and grieving student. Learning how these

students are personally affected by specific grief intervention programs should be a top priority for researchers and school personnel.

In a study about adolescents' reactions to the death of a peer, O'Brien and associates (1991) found that for many of the subjects there seemed to be few people they could speak with about their feelings. O'Brien, Goodenow, and Espin (1991) concluded that, "it appeared they may not have had enough opportunities to verbalize their experience (p. 435)." In a study conducted by Huss (1999), it was found that participation in a support group for parentally bereaved children did not significantly affect their self-esteem, levels of depression, behavior, or their self-beliefs about their ability to cope with loss. Perhaps further research could be conducted on that particular support group to determine a more beneficial means of aiding children with their grief.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine students' and counselors' perceptions of the essential and beneficial elements of school based intervention programs for grieving students in schools (K-12). Data were collected from students via surveys distributed and conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Stout during the spring of 2001. Additional data were collected from school counselors via mailed surveys. It is the intention of the researcher that this study be used as a resource by professional school counselors and able them to better serve their grieving students.

Research Objectives

There are five main objectives this research intends to address. They are:

1. Through counselor surveys, determine the counselors' views about how beneficial they feel particular grief intervention services are.

2. Through student surveys, determine the students' views about how beneficial they feel particular grief intervention services were.

3. Identify any discrepancies between the ratings/views of counselors regarding grief interventions and those of students.

4. Identify any differences in grief interventions provided and preferred in relation to the type of death that shaped the event.

5. Identify which supportive comments and actions are considered most helpful by grieving students and counselors.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined.

Grieving Student - Any student who is affected in some way by the death of a parent, friend, peer, classmate or significant other.

Intervention Program for Grieving Students - Any program established by guidance counselors and other school personnel for the purpose of aiding students in the process of grieving. The program may contain a number of services such as group discussions, individual counseling, debriefing, and others.

Referred to Outside Counseling - In the process of providing grief services to students, counselors may refer some individuals to outside agencies who are more suited, that are licensed specifically to provide specific grief counseling interventions.

Memorializing Event - Any activity or event that students and/or staff participate in which can be viewed as a tribute to the deceased. Some examples include dedicating a page in the school year book to the deceased or painting a wall or mural in dedication to the deceased.

<u>Assumptions</u>

There are several assumptions which are apparent in this research. They are:

1. It is assumed that the counselors and students answered the surveys as honestly as possible in regards to the intervention services offered.

2. It is assumed that the memories of the students and counselors were accurate and factual.

3. It is assumed that the timing of the surveys and interviews in relation to the death or deaths being grieved lends itself to the collection of significant and valid data.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will discuss past research related to the topics of death, grief, and grief interventions. Adolescents' responses to death, the school's role in the grieving process, types of services offered, and other areas will be discussed.

Since providing grief intervention services is now an accepted responsibility of the school, it is important that school counselors and other school personnel be knowledgeable about death, grief, and bereavement. Those working in our schools can not be expected to provide adequate and beneficial services to grieving students if they don't have at least a general knowledge in this area. Therefore, prior to exploring the possible services that can be offered, one must acknowledge the prerequisites that a counselor should possess in this area.

Irwin and Melbin-Helberg (1992) suggested "effective understanding of and empathy with the client's grief experience may require the counselor to be in touch with the meaning of death at a personal and emotional level" (p. 74). This is an interesting issue to consider. Perhaps a school counselor must have prior personal experience with grief and death in order to truly be an empathic helper and listener to grieving students. While personal experience and understanding of the grieving process is probably helpful, formal knowledge and training in the area of death and grief are also important. Feigal (1991) found that 42 percent of the school personnel subjects in the study expressed a need for more in-service training on grief in their school districts. Similarly, one counselor from a study conducted by Budzinski (1998) "suggested that school counseling

preparation programs include grief group work in practicum, internship, or in a clinical experience" (p. 18). Although counselors and other school personnel may be well intentioned, they may not have the resources available in order to become well versed in the area of death and grief.

Working closely with grieving students, although rewarding, can also be very challenging. O'Brien, Goodenow, and Espin (1991) reported that students often may focus on the inevitability of their own death rather than on the specific loss of a friend or loved one. This may come as a surprise to many counselors who are providing services to grieving students, but they must recognize that it is a healthy and normal response.

While it is important for counselors to know what questions to ask their grieving student, there are also some questions that counselors should ask of themselves to ensure that the student continues to grieve in a healthy manner. According to Freeman and Ward (1998), there are several questions which counselors should examine when working with grieving and bereaved students: "Where is this person in terms of confronting the reality that their loved one has died? Has this person allowed himself or herself to experience the pain of grief? Where is this person in the process of converting the relationship from one of presence to one of memory? Where is the bereaved in the process of forming a new self-identity?" (pp. 220-221). It is hoped that counselors will already have these questions in mind when faced with a grieving students. By exploring these questions, counselors can better aid the grieving student.

Most counselors, if not all of them, want to do all they can to help their students grieve in a healthy way. If not approached in the right way, counselors' efforts may only serve to confuse and irritate the very students they are trying to help. Adolescents form a

special and distinct group, and they react and respond in different ways. According to Thompson (1990), there are several special treatment issues with adolescents, which need to be addressed. These issues include: Realize their lack of life experience in handling trauma; allow expression of feelings such as sorrow, hostility, and guilt; encourage discussion; watch for emergence of unfinished business; correct any distortions they may have; and identify and help resolve adolescents' sense of powerlessness.

Of the various grief intervention services that are offered in our schools, which are the most appropriate and beneficial? This study intends to address that question specifically. There have been numerous studies regarding what is most important, that have reported on the opinions of school personnel, experts, and researchers. In a study conducted by Feigal (1991), it was found that over half of the school personnel who were questioned were not satisfied with the design of the grief programs in their school districts. Feigal also found that 50 percent were not satisfied with the implementation of the grief programs in their school districts. It is important that researchers discover which types of services school personnel feel are helpful to grieving students.

All types of student and teacher deaths are unfortunate. Suicide is a type of death that, although similar to other types of death in some ways, may require a slightly different type of support and intervention. Thompson (1990) explained that during the first 48 hours following a student suicide it is vitally important to verify what happened, seek resources in the community, convene the school's crisis management team, identify students whom faculty and staff are concerned about, and make counselors available to students. In a related article, Roberts, Lepkowski, and Davidson (1998) described a team approach to intervention services following a student suicide, which includes developing

a team, establishing procedures, arranging supports, and monitoring progress. Also discussed in this study is the importance of planning memorial activities. Roberts, Lepkowski, and Davidson (1998) stated that "communicating and organizing memorial plans is an important task for the team. These plans should include how to handle student wishes to attend and perhaps participate in the funeral. All activities should be coordinated with the family" (p. 52).

In another article by Thompson (1990), the author identified the seven essential stages of effective post-traumatic loss debriefing as: introductory stage, fact stage, life-review stage, feeling stage, reaction stage, and closure. Thompson (1990) also added that, "the particular pattern of the emotional reaction and type of response will differ with each survivor depending on the relationship of the deceased, circumstances surrounding the death, and coping mechanisms of the survivors" (p. 18). The latter point made by Thompson supports the decision by the present researcher to include in the survey a question regarding the relationship between the respondent and the deceased.

Errington and Prestridge (1995) also stressed the importance of having an effective crisis intervention plan in place. These authors stated, "Immediate intervention following an emergency may help students deal with the immediate after effects of a death or loss and may alleviate or lessen long-term effects" (p. 1). Similar to what Thompson had stated, Errington and Prestridge felt that identification of those students that are at high risk and were closely affected by the crisis is a very important function of the crisis team.

Brock (1998) discussed the effectiveness of a group of services for grief and traumatic events, which is labeled Classroom Crisis Intervention. This method of grief

and trauma intervention involves meeting in classroom groups of 15 to 30 students. Brock recommended that Classroom Crisis Intervention be provided on the first school day following the death or traumatic event. If school officials wait any longer to provide these services, they can no longer be considered part of a crisis intervention. The first 24 hours following a tragedy or crisis are the most crucial for counselors and crisis team members. This model of group therapy involves six steps: Introduction, providing the facts and dispelling the rumors, allowing students to share stories, allowing students to share reactions to the event, empowerment, and closure.

Rosenblatt and Elde (1990) conducted a study which showed that shared reminiscence about the deceased can be one of the most beneficial types of activities for people experiencing grief. Students were encouraged to share humorous and touching stories about the deceased while in a group setting. Perhaps this study reveals that schools should make more of an effort to plan times and settings for which shared reminiscence is encouraged.

Along with all of the possible grief services that can be offered, some researchers have also stressed the importance of providing the students with routine as quickly as possible (Kelly, 2001; McGlauflin, 1998). This can give the students a needed source of hope that, although they may be hurting, life will still go on. The decision of whether to provide students with routine and when to do so should be made on a situational basis. School officials obviously do not want to deprive students of valuable mourning and grieving time.

In many cases, grief groups can be very helpful and beneficial for grieving students. Some people feel differently, however. Budzinski (1998) reported that,

"unfortunately, because the grief process is individual and involves various styles for each person, the schools commonly hold grief groups which address only acute grief and do not sufficiently aid students in their individual needs in coping with a death" (p. 7). Although certainly beneficial for some, grief groups may indeed only offer partial assistance to students. Grief groups need to be supported by other services in the schools.

Other researchers and authors go even further and question the merit of grief counseling altogether. Seligman (2000) suggested that the whole phenomenon of grief counseling is oversold in an effort to make it a successful business. Woodard (1997) referred to grief counseling as an "ungoverned and unsubstantiated profession" (p. 34). Although there may be some grief counseling organizations whose aim and effectiveness should be questioned, the fact still remains that school counselors need to be a vital part of providing some type of support for grieving students. The many studies that support the importance of grief services in schools far outnumber those studies that call this type of support into question.

The present study is focused on discovering the perspective of the students on the issue of grief interventions. Although the knowledge and insight of experts, researchers, and school personnel certainly cannot be overlooked, the opinions of the students should be of utmost interest to anyone attempting to provide grief services in the schools. Who, other than those that the services are aimed at, would be able to better identify the services that were most beneficial? O'Brien, Goodenow, and Espin (1991) reported that the student participants in their study "felt it would have been helpful to have announcements in school about the death, devote pages in the yearbook, designate times for talking to counselors, have someone come to the school to talk about death, and

possibly form a grief group to ventilate feelings of loss" (p. 436). A large majority of subjects in the Rosenblatt and Elde (1990) study reported that shared reminiscence about the deceased was personally important to them. One of the students in the O'Brien, Goodenow, and Espin study talked about the benefits of having individual therapy available. The student explained that individual therapy allowed her to condense her daydreaming about the death into a one-hour session each week, and prevented an emotional overload.

Goldberg and Leyden (1998) performed a study involving a rehabilitation curriculum aimed at teaching children to grieve. The authors reported that before the group experience, many of the children felt very isolated and alone. However, through post-group interviews, they found that the children "no longer felt that they were totally on their own, appreciating the knowledge that other children had lost significant others, and the opportunity to talk about their loss" (p. 126). At the very least, these results are what those managing grief groups hope for. It is important that students come to the realization that they are not the only ones experiencing pain and grief over the loss of a loved one or fellow student.

Morin and Welsh (1996) found that the most helpful sentiments expressed to suburban adolescents during times of grieving were "Time will help" (35.3%), "Person is happier now" (17.6%), and "Remember times past" (11.8%). These little sentiments that counselors and teachers express to grieving students are all part of the total package of grief services offered. Expressing proper and helpful sentiments should be considered very important gestures by counselors and school personnel. Morin and Welsh also reported that adolescents suggested that adults who are helping students to grieve should

talk, listen, provide emotional support, and remind students that the person is in a better place. This is especially helpful information, since it is common for adult school personnel to be unsure about what to say to grieving students. Listening to what students have to say about this will help school personnel feel confident that they are providing beneficial and proper support.

The age of the grieving individual also plays a role in how the grieving process is undertaken, and should affect the decision of which grief intervention services and supportive comments to utilize. Unfortunately, adolescents are many times grouped together either with children or adults and it is assumed that their grieving patterns and mourning experiences are similar to those groups (Lenhardt and McCourt, 2000). It is important that school counselors realize that children, adolescents, and adults are all distinct groups who may need different grief intervention services and support. The present study will attempt to gain results related to this idea as well.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

   This chapter will describe the research questions, the subjects under study and how they were selected for inclusion in this study. In addition, the instruments being used to collect information will be discussed. Data collection and analysis procedures will then be presented. The chapter will conclude with some of the methodological limitations.

Research Questions

   This study had five main research questions. They were:

1. Which grief intervention services do school counselors identify as being the most beneficial and the least beneficial?

2. Which grief intervention services do students identify as being the most beneficial and the least beneficial?

3. What are the discrepancies between the ratings/views of counselors regarding grief interventions and those of students?

4. Do counselors and students prefer different grief intervention services depending on what type of death that shaped the event?

5. Which supportive comments and actions are considered most helpful by grieving students and counselors?

<u>Subjects</u>

The student subjects in the sample were obtained by gaining permission by the University of Wisconsin -Stout to administer surveys to general education classes occupied by freshman students. 100 students participated in this study and were asked to recall a past experience of grief from their time in school (K-12). The counselor subjects included in the sample were obtained by mailing the surveys to school counselors employed at various levels within K-12 systems throughout the state of Wisconsin. A total of 88 surveys were mailed to counselors and 44 surveys were returned, leading to a response rate of 50 percent.

<u>Instrumentation</u>

Two 9-item questionnaires were developed by the researcher specifically for use in this study (Appendices A and B). The questionnaires were designed for the purpose of obtaining information from counselors and students regarding questions of facts and opinions, as well as other topics related to grief intervention counseling. The questions regarding specific grief interventions and specific supportive comments/actions asked subjects to respond by using a 5-point Likert scale: 1= "not helpful"; 2= "slightly helpful"; 3= "moderately helpful"; 4= "very helpful"; 5= "extremely helpful". Other questions on the survey demanded that the subjects respond by checking the appropriate box that most closely fits their feeling on the particular subject.

On both the student and counselor forms of the survey, subjects who could recall a student, teacher, staff, or family member death occurring while they were a student or counselor were asked to complete Part A. Those students and counselors who could not recall any such event occurring were asked to complete Part B of the survey. Part A

included items regarding relationship to the deceased, type of death, and ratings of the school's efforts related to the grief intervention services. Since those who completed only Part B of the survey had not experienced any perceived grief-inducing event, those subjects could only be asked to answer the questions in terms of how helpful the given intervention services and comments might be for a student in such a situation.

Procedure

Permission was gained from the Department of Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Wisconsin-Stout to proceed with this study using the two forms of the survey along with the consent form. Several questionnaires along with consent forms and self-addressed stamped envelopes were mailed to random school counselors in Wisconsin. The researcher gained permission for access to five general education classes consisting of freshman students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The researcher introduced himself, provided a rationale for the present study, and explained that participation was completely voluntary and that all subjects' names would be kept confidential. While this was accomplished on paper using the consent form for the school counselors in the sample, these same things were accomplished both verbally and by use of the consent form for the students in the sample. The researcher distributed the student surveys and collected them from all students willing to participate.

Limitations

There are several limitations which are apparent in this research. They are:

1. The effect that grief intervention services have on students at the time of the study may deviate from students' perceived long-term effects of the services.

2. Relying on school counselors to report which services were offered may lend itself to manipulation, since they may want to provide an impressive account of their program.

3.   Students may not realize the importance and effectiveness of particular services that were provided for them, and therefore may give them a lower rating.

4. There are no available measures of validity or reliability for the instrument used for this study. This risk is assumed to have minimal impact, since the form produces descriptive data of subjective opinions.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine students' and counselors' perceptions of the essential and beneficial elements of school based intervention programs for grieving students in schools (K-12). In this section, the results of the present study will be stated. Some general descriptive statistics that are important and interesting for the purposes of this study will be given first. The research questions for this study will then be restated, followed by the findings in regards to those specific questions. This section will conclude with a report of other significant and interesting findings that are not directly related to the research questions.

As previously mentioned, a total of 144 subjects voluntarily participated in this study. One hundred of the subjects were students and 44 of the subjects were school counselors. Table 1 presents data on the groups to which these services were directed. The most common response to question number 3 (Appendix A) was "9-12" (54.6%), meaning that the majority of the students to whom the services were directed at were in grades 9 through 12. Table 2 presents data on death occurrences. "Student accident" (45.8%) was the most common type of death specified, followed by "student suicide" (29.2%). In terms of grief intervention services, "individual counseling (n=86) and supportive comments (n=82) were used or offered the most. In contrast, "family counseling" (n=42) and "crisis teams" (n=49) were used or offered the least amount of times.

Table 1.   Groups To Whom Intervention Services Were Directed

	Group	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	k-4	8	8.2	8.2
	5-8	15	15.5	23.7
	9-12	53	54.6	78.4
	all groups	5	5.2	83.5
	k-8	5	5.2	88.7
	5-12	2	2.1	90.7
	k-4/teachers&staff	1	1.0	91.8
	9-12/teachers&staff	8	8.2	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	
	no occurrences	47		
Total		144		

Table 2.   Type of Death

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	student suicide	28	29.2	29.2
	teacher suicide	3	3.1	32.3
	student accident	44	45.8	78.1
	teacher accident	1	1.0	79.2
	student/teacher extended illness	8	8.3	87.5
	other	10	10.4	97.9
	don't know	2	2.1	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	
	no occurrences	48		
Total		144		

This study had five main research questions. They were:

1. Which grief intervention services do school counselors identify as being the most beneficial and the least beneficial?

2.   Which grief intervention services do students identify as being the most beneficial and the least beneficial?

3. What are the discrepancies between the ratings/views of counselors regarding grief interventions and those of students?

4. Do counselors and students prefer different grief intervention services depending on what type of death that shaped the event?

5. Which supportive comments and actions are considered most helpful by grieving students and counselors?

The main findings of this study based on the research questions were:

1. School counselors who completed Part A of the survey reported that the most beneficial grief intervention service was individual counseling (4.33), followed by crisis teams (4.13) and group counseling (4.12). The least beneficial grief intervention service according to school counselors was family counseling (3.23), followed by outside referrals (3.59) and memorializing events (3.80). Table 3 presents data on this subject.

2. Students who completed Part A of the survey reported that the most beneficial grief intervention service was a memorializing event (3.78), followed by supportive comments (3.51) and group counseling (3.44). The least beneficial grief intervention service according to students was family counseling (1.97), followed by outside referral (2.31) and crisis team (2.72). Table 3 presents data for the interventions for both counselors and students.

Table 3.   **Ratings of Grief Intervention Services**

Service	student/counselor	N	Mean	p value
individual counseling	student	53	3.25	.000*
	counselor	33	4.33	.000*
class discussion	student	53	3.19	.000*
	counselor	28	3.86	.007*
family counseling	student	29	1.97	.000*
	counselor	13	3.23	.000*
supportive comments	student	55	3.51	.009*
	counselor	27	4.07	.000*
group counseling	student	45	3.44	.000*
	counselor	26	4.12	.014*
outside referral	student	32	2.31	.000*
	counselor	27	3.59	.000*
memorializing event	student	45	3.78	.000*
	counselor	15	3.80	.000*
crisis team	student	25	2.72	.001*
	counselor	24	4.13	.000*
other	student	0	.	.
	counselor	3	4.00	.020*

* - indicates statistically significant difference

Taking a closer look at the ratings of students and counselors for individual counseling, it is interesting to see how differently the two groups rated this particular service. As Table 4 illustrates, 39.4% of the counselors who answered the question rated individual counseling as "extremely helpful", while only 5.7% of students who answered

the question rated that same service as "extremely helpful". While 10 students rated individual counseling as either "not helpful" or "slightly helpful", no counselors gave individual counseling a rating lower than "moderately helpful".

Table 4.   **Rating Frequencies for Individual Counseling**

Group			Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
student	Valid	not helpful	4	7.5	7.5
		slightly helpful	6	11.3	18.9
		moderately helpful	19	35.8	54.7
		very helpful	21	39.6	94.3
		extremely helpful	3	5.7	100.0
		Total	53	100.0	
		no rating provided	47		
	Total		100		
counselor	Valid	moderately helpful	2	6.1	6.1
		very helpful	18	54.5	60.6
		extremely helpful	13	39.4	100.0
		Total	33	100.0	
		no rating provided	11		
	Total		44		

3. The main discrepancy between counselors' and students' ratings of grief intervention services was that counselors rated each individual intervention as more beneficial than did students. The school counselors in this survey, collectively, had a more positive outlook than the students on all of the grief intervention services. Also, the highest rated intervention for students (memorializing event) was rated lower than all but two interventions by counselors (family counseling and outside referral). Table 3 illustrates these points.

4. Counselors' and students' ratings were examined to determine any differences between grief intervention services preferred depending on what type of death had

occurred. Individual counseling was rated as one of the top two services in every type of death category except for "student accident". When a student accident was the grief-inducing event, students and counselors as a whole preferred memorializing events and group counseling over other services. Table 5 illustrates the ratings of the various interventions when a student suicide or student accident is the type of death. In instances of a student suicide, crisis team (3.67) and group counseling (3.63) were rated as the 2nd and 3rd most beneficial grief intervention service. Crisis team was not rated in the top 3 for any other type of death, and student accident was the only other type of death for which group counseling was rated in the top 3.

Table 5.   Intervention Ratings by Students and Counselors as a Whole When Student Suicide or Student Accident is the Type of Death

Intervention	Type of Death	N	Mean	p value
individual counseling	student suicide	26	3.69^	.506
	student accident	38	3.53	.506
class discussion	student suicide	22	3.55	.480
	student accident	38	3.34	.480
family counseling	student suicide	12	2.08	.293
	student accident	16	2.50	.293
supportive comments	student suicide	24	3.58	.353
	student accident	35	3.80	.353
group counseling	student suicide	24	3.63	.116
	student accident	32	4.06	.116
outside referral	student suicide	18	3.11	.586
	student accident	24	2.92	.586
memorializing event	student suicide	13	3.15	.011*
	student accident	30	4.07^^	.011*
crisis team	student suicide	18	3.67	.965
	student accident	16	3.69	.965
other	student suicide	1	3.00	.
	student accident	1	4.00	.

  * - statistically significant
  ^ - most preferred intervention after student suicide
  ^^ - most preferred intervention after student accident

5. Table 6 presents data on the supportive comments and actions. School counselors who completed Part A of the survey found these supportive comments or actions most helpful: "Tell me about a good memory" (4.18); "I'm here and I want to listen" (4.04); and empathizing with sadness (3.93). Students who completed Part A of the survey found the following supportive comments or actions most helpful: "I'm here and I want to listen" (3.83); "Tell me about a good memory" (3.50); and "What can I do to help?" (3.48). The two ratings for the "other" category will be examined in the Discussion chapter.

It is obvious from Table 2 that students and counselors have differing viewpoints on the comment "You must be hurting". Table 7 illustrates more closely how differently students and counselors rated this particular comment. While 68.9% of students who answered the question rated this comment as either "not helpful" or "slightly helpful", 78.6% of counselors who answered the question rated it as either "moderately helpful", "very helpful", or "extremely helpful".

Some of the most interesting, and perhaps most useful, data gathered from the results of this study are those in regards to question number 7 on the survey (Appendix A). Table 8 presents data on the School Helpfulness Rating. When asked to rate (on a scale of 1 to 10) overall how effective and helpful the school was in the grieving process of students, school counselors provided a significantly higher rating (8.03) than did the students (5.72). These results are similar to the results for the specific grief intervention section, in which counselors consistently gave more favorable ratings.

Table 6. Ratings of Comments and Actions by Counselors Versus Students

Comment	student/counselor	N	Mean	p value
You must be hurting	student	45	2.04	.742
	counselor	28	3.46	
tell me about a good memory	student	48	3.50	.236
	counselor	28	4.18	.272
how are you doing with all this?	student	49	3.18	.545
	counselor	26	3.58	1.000
I'm here and I want to listen	student	48	3.83	.588
	counselor	28	4.04	
Time will help	student	49	2.29	.629
	counselor	28	1.96	1.000
He/she is in a better place	student	51	2.65	.822
	counselor	27	1.67	.272
I'm sad for you	student	43	2.21	.388
	counselor	26	3.08	.591
What can I do to help?	student	44	3.48	.626
	counselor	28	3.54	.133
Explaining death in detail	student	44	1.93	.067
	counselor	25	2.44	.270
shielding students from facts	student	46	1.48	.883
	counselor	25	1.28	
empathizing with sadness	student	49	3.24	.314
	counselor	28	3.93	.495

Table 7.   Rating Frequencies for "You Must Be Hurting"

Group		Rating	Frequency	Percent	Percent Excluding "not used"
student	Valid	not helpful	19	19.0	42.2
		slightly helpful	12	12.0	26.7
		moderately helpful	8	8.0	17.8
		very helpful	5	5.0	11.1
		extremely helpful	1	1.0	2.2
		Total	45	45.0	100.0
		not used	55	55.0	
	Total		100	100.0	
counselor	Valid	not helpful	3	6.8	10.7
		slightly helpful	3	6.8	10.7
		moderately helpful	7	15.9	25.0
		very helpful	8	18.2	28.6
		extremely helpful	7	15.9	25.0
		Total	28	63.6	100.0
		not used	16	36.4	
	Total		44	100.0	

Table 8.   School Helpfulness Rating by Counselors Versus Students

	student/counselor	N	Mean	p value
How helpful and effective was school?	student	65	5.72	.000**
	counselor	33	8.03	.000**

** - p<.001

Student and counselor ratings of grief intervention services and helpful

comment/actions in Part B of the survey (completed by those who had not experienced a

grief-inducing event) were somewhat similar to those in Part A. Table 9 presents data

from the Part B of the surveys. When asked to rate the various grief intervention services

in terms of what they thought *would be* most beneficial, students in Part B ranked

individual counseling (4.06) highest, followed by memorializing event (3.69) and group

counseling (3.62). The main difference between these results and those from Part A of

the survey is that individual counseling was regarded as the most beneficial by students

answering Part B. Individual counseling was not one of the three services that students

completing Part A of the survey identified as being most beneficial.

Table 9.   **Part B Ratings of Intervention Services**

	student/counselor	N	Mean	p value
individual counseling-B	student	35	4.06	.021*
	counselor	11	4.82	.021*
class discussion-B	student	34	3.32	.047*
	counselor	10	4.00	.047*
family counseling-B	student	34	3.26	.260
	counselor	11	3.73	.260
supportive comments-B	student	34	3.53	.011*
	counselor	11	4.45	.011*
group counseling-B	student	34	3.62	.020*
	counselor	11	4.45	.020*
referral to outside-B	student	35	3.17	.113
	counselor	10	3.80	.113
memorializing event-B	student	35	3.69	.270
	counselor	10	3.20	.270
other-B	student	0	.	.
	counselor	0	.	.

     * - statistically significant

Counselors completing Part B of the survey also gave individual counseling the

highest mean rating (4.82), followed by supportive comments (4.45) and group

counseling (4.45). Comparing these results to those from Part A, counselors who have

had experience in dealing with grief issues feel that crisis teams are more beneficial than

are supportive comments.

Chapter V

Discussion

The results of the present study are valuable, since the existing literature has rarely addressed the feelings of both professionals and students in one sampling. A major strength of this study is that it accomplishes that task. The results of the present study show that the perceptions of students and counselors regarding the effectiveness of school based grief intervention services are very different. A major finding of this study is gained from question number 7 of the survey, which asked students and counselors to give a 1 to 10 rating based on how helpful they feel the school was for the grieving student (see Appendix A). The mean rating by school counselors was 8.03 while the mean rating of students was 5.72. One may expect that the professional that is personally involved in delivering the grief services would attach a more favorable rating to those services. Perhaps students as a whole did not truly realize the degree to which some of the intervention services actually helped them. Most, if not all counselors have training in grief-related matters. Therefore, some may argue that school counselors are better qualified to supply a rating of effectiveness for grief intervention services. Although these explanations may factor into the results, there is another main point that can be interpreted from the results. Ultimately, the most important outcome that can be hoped for is that each individual that is grieving a death gets the help and support she or he needs to make it a healthy and growing experience. The significant difference in mean rating of school effectiveness showed that the students felt that the school could have done more to help, or that it provided only a minor role in their eyes. School counselors

must be supplied with the knowledge necessary to ensure that each grieving student is given the proper help and grief intervention services.

Another important finding of this research is that students and counselors have very contrasting feelings regarding which intervention services are the most helpful and beneficial. While students reported that the most beneficial grief intervention service was a memorializing event (3.78), followed by supportive comments (3.51) and group counseling (3.44), counselors felt that the three most beneficial services were individual counseling (4.33), followed by crisis teams (4.13) and group counseling (4.12). Perhaps counselors should concentrate their efforts more on making supportive comments and allowing for a memorializing event rather than on providing individual counseling and the implementation of a crisis team.

However, it is notable that students do not list "memorializing event" as one of the two most beneficial services when a student suicide is the type of death. Counselors and students seem to agree that a memorializing event is not the most beneficial intervention service for those grieving a student suicide, giving it a mean rating of 3.00 and 3.22 respectively. One may conclude that counselors and students alike feel that a suicide should not be glorified or given too much attention, since that could put a positive outlook on the act and ultimately lead to further suicides.

The researcher would like to point out that the interpretation of some of the results from this study was complicated by the fact that students gave a lower mean rating for all of the grief intervention services. As a result, at times the mean ratings of counselors and students for a particular intervention service were similar while the rank order of helpfulness of that service was drastically different. The researcher would like the reader

to take this into account, but feels that the differences in rank order of helpfulness are important pieces of data in this study.

The top three supportive comments in terms of mean rating by students and counselors were very similar ("Tell me about a good memory" and "I'm here and I want to listen" were the top two for both groups). There was one interesting difference and a few other interesting similarities that were noteworthy. While counselors gave "You must be hurting" a mean rating of 3.46 (3=moderately helpful and 4=very helpful), students gave that same supportive comment a significantly lower mean rating of 2.04 (2=slightly helpful). Those students who were in grades 9-12 when the death occurred gave "You must be hurting" an even lower mean rating (1.85). Counselors should be urged to make other helpful comments and refrain from making that comment, since students found it only slightly helpful, or consider at which age it is more appropriate. Both students and counselors gave "Time will help" (2.29 and 1.96) and "Shielding students from the facts" (1.48 and 1.28) very low mean ratings on the helpfulness scale. It is important for school counselors to make comments and take actions that the students find most helpful.

As mentioned in the results section, two subjects in this study supplied responses to the "other" category under the supportive comments and actions section of the survey (question 2, Appendix A). Since both respondents attached a rating of 5 to these actions, the researcher feels it is important to inform the reader of the responses. The counselor who responded to this question replied, "Gave a card or gift". The student who responded to this question replied, "Listened". The counselor's response suggests that making an extra effort to let the grieving student know that you personally care about

their well-being is effective. However, that is only a realistic option when the number of grieving individual(s) is very small. The student's response suggests that there is a difference between saying, "I'm here and I want to listen" and actually listening to what the student is expressing. Showing students that you really do care and always have time for them is important for school counselors.

There were some interesting responses to the item on the survey which asks students to identify anything else they wish the school had done differently. Five of the 25 subjects who responded to that item said "Allow more time to grieve", or something very similar. Although students can indeed benefit from getting back into a routine at school, counselors need to ensure that each individual gets the appropriate amount of time they need to mourn and grieve in a healthy manner. One student and one counselor responded to this item by listing "less attention given to the death". In both of those instances, suicide was the type of death listed.

There are some weaknesses that need to be recognized in this study. The design of the study allowed for the possibility of there being a long delay between the time that the event occurred and the time that the subjects completed the surveys. Since the researcher developed the instruments used in this study, values of reliability and validity were not available. Also, the sample used in this study was partially formed by convenience. All of the student subjects were enrolled in classes at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. All of the counselors were employed in the state of Wisconsin. Therefore, the subjects and results of this study may be considered geographically specific.

Since grades 9-12 was the grade level that yielded the most response to this survey, it was difficult to see any significant results in regards to differences based on age. Future research is needed to further isolate the variable of age in order to determine the differences in grief intervention services used and preferred. Future studies could benefit from taking place directly following a school-related death, which would eliminate the element of time delay that was a part of this study. If access would be granted to the school, the researcher could survey students directly following the death and then again after the school has implemented various grief intervention services. Perhaps that method would more directly answer the questions that school counselors have regarding grief interventions. The researcher feels that the present study has made a significant contribution to the existing literature. However, future research would be beneficial in continuing to expand professional school counselors' knowledge in the area of grief intervention services.

Appendix A

Counselor Survey:

Directions: Complete only one part of survey, not both. Do only part A if: a student death or teacher/staff death has occurred during your professional counseling career. Answer the questions in regards to the **one** event that sticks out in your mind (most recent, most devastating, etc…). **Please skip part A and complete the questions in part B on the back of this form if**: such an event has not occurred during your counseling career.

<u>PART A:</u>
1. Please rate on a scale from 1-5 each of the grief services that your school offered based on how helpful you feel it was for the students. **If you/your school did not offer the service, leave the corresponding space blank.** 1=not helpful 2=slightly helpful 3=moderately helpful 4=very helpful 5=extremely helpful

       Individual Counseling_____   Group Counseling(Support Group)_____
       Class Discussion_____   Referred to Outside Counseling_____
       Family Counseling_____   Held a Memorializing Event_____
       Supportive Comments from Staff_____   District Crisis Team Visit_____
       Other(please specify)_____ _____

2. Using the same scale of 1 to 5 that was used in question 1, please **rate all** of the following comments or actions in regards to how helpful you think they are in comforting a grieving student. If you personally used any comments or actions similar to these to offer support, place a check in the appropriate box.

    ☑=used personally   ☑=used personally
☐ "He/she is in a better place."_____   ☐ "I'm sad for you"_____
☐ "What can I do to help?"_____   ☐ "How are you doing with all this?"_____
☐ "You must really be hurting."_____   ☐ Explaining death in detail_____
☐ "Tell me about a good memory."_____ ☐ Shielding students from the facts_____
☐ "Time will help."_____   ☐ Empathizing with sadness_____
☐ "I'm here and I want to listen."_____ ☐ Other(specify)_____ ____

3. To what group(s) of people were these services offered?
       Grades K-4____   Grades 5-8____   Grades 9-12____   Teachers/Staff____

4. What type of death shaped this event?
       Student suicide___   Teacher suicide___   Student accident___

       Teacher accident___   Student/Teacher death from extended illness___

       Other(please specify)_____   Don't know___

5. Please list anything that you wish could have been offered or done differently by you and/or the school. _____

6. Why were you unable to offer the service(s) you listed in question 5?
   I left #5 blank___   Didn't think of it___   Administrative Decision___
   Lack of funding___   Other(specify)_____

7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being least helpful, 10 being most helpful), how helpful and effective do you think the school was in aiding students in the grieving process?_____

Part B: If you completed part A, do not go any further. Please return the survey. If you have not experienced any event that resulted in grief (i.e. student, teacher/staff, or parent death) since you have been a professional counselor, please complete the following questions.

8. Below is a list of possible grief intervention services that could be offered. Please rate on a scale from 1-5 each of these services in terms of how helpful you feel it would be for grieving students.
1=not helpful **2**=slightly helpful **3**=moderately helpful **4**=very helpful
5=extremely helpful
   Individual Counseling_____   Group Counseling(Support Group)_____
   Class Discussion_____   Referrals to Outside Counseling_____
   Family Counseling_____   Holding a Memorializing Event_____
   Supportive Comments from Staff_____
   Other(please specify)_____ _____

9. How helpful do you think these supportive comments or actions would be in regards to comforting a grieving student? Please rate each one on a scale of 1 to 5. **1**=not helpful
2=slightly helpful **3**=moderately helpful **4**=very helpful **5**=extremely helpful
   "He/she is in a better place."_____   "What can I do to help?"_____
   "You must really be hurting."_____   "Tell me about a good memory."_____
   "Time will help."_____   "I'm here and I want to listen."_____
   "I'm sad for you."_____   "How are you doing with all this?"_____
   Explaining the death in detail_____   Shielding students from the facts_____
   Empathizing with sadness_____   Other(specify)_____ _____

Appendix B

Student Survey:

Directions: Complete only one part of the survey, not both. Do only Part A and return if: an event such as a student death or teacher death occurred at least once while you were in school (Kindergarten through high school). Answer the questions in regards to the one event that sticks out in your mind (most recent, most devastating, etc…). Please skip part A and complete the questions in part B on the back of this form if: you do not recall any such events occurring while in school (K-12).

PART A:

1. Please rate on a scale from 1-5 each of the grief services that your school offered based on how helpful you feel it was for you. If your school did not offer the service, leave the corresponding space blank. 1=not helpful 2=slightly helpful 3=moderately helpful 4=very helpful 5=extremely helpful

Individual Counseling_____   Group Counseling(Support Group)_____
Class Discussion_____   Referred to Outside Counseling_____
Family Counseling_____   Held a Memorializing Event_____
Supportive Comments from Staff_____ District Crisis Team Visit_____
Other(please specify)_____ _____

2. Using the same scale of 1 to 5 that was used in question 1, please rate all of these supportive comments or actions in regards to how helpful and comforting you think they are/would be. If someone at your school actually used any comments or actions similar to these to comfort you, place a check in the appropriate box in addition to the rating.

☑=used personally   ☑=used personally
☐ "He/she is in a better place."_____   ☐ "I'm sad for you"_____
☐ "What can I do to help?"_____   ☐ "How are you doing with all this?"_____
☐ "You must really be hurting."_____   ☐ Explaining death in detail_____
☐ "Tell me about a good memory."_____   ☐ Shielding students from the facts_____
☐ "Time will help."_____   ☐ Empathizing with sadness_____
☐ "I'm here and I want to listen."_____   ☐ Other(specify)_____ ____

3. What level of school were YOU in when this event occurred?
        Grades K-4____   Grades 5-8____   Grades 9-12____   Teachers/Staff____

4. What type of death shaped this event?
student suicide___   teacher suicide___   student accident___   teacher accident___
student/teacher death after extended illness(e.g. cancer)___
Other(please specify)_____   Don't know___

5. How would you categorize the relationship you had with the person who died?
        Close Friends___   Friends___   Acquaintance___
Didn't know very well___   Other(specify)_____

6. Please list anything that you wish could have been offered or done differently by the school to help you. _____

7. On a scale from 1 to 10(1 being least helpful, 10 being most helpful), how helpful and effective do you think the school was in aiding you in the grieving process?_____

Part B: If you completed part A, do not go any further. Please return the survey. If you have not experienced any event that resulted in grief (i.e. student, teacher/staff, or parent death) while you were a student (K-12), please complete the following questions.

8. Below is a list of possible grief intervention services that could be offered to students following a student or teacher/staff death. Please rate on a scale from 1-5 each of these services in terms of how helpful you feel it would be for grieving students.
1=not helpful 2=slightly helpful 3=moderately helpful 4=very helpful
5=extremely helpful
Individual Counseling_____   Group Counseling(Support Group)_____
Class Discussion_____   Referrals to Outside Counseling_____
Family Counseling_____   Holding a Memorializing Event_____
Supportive Comments from Staff_____
Other(please specify)_____ _____

9. How helpful do you think these supportive comments or actions would be in regards to comforting a grieving student? Please rate each one on a scale of 1 to 5. 1=not helpful 2=slightly helpful 3=moderately helpful 4=very helpful 5=extremely helpful
     "He/she is in a better place."____   "What can I do to help?"____
     "You must really be hurting."____   "Tell me about a good memory."____
     "Time will help."____   "I'm here and I want to listen."____
     "I'm sad for you."____   "How are you doing with all this?"____
     Explaining the death in detail____   Shielding students from the facts____
Empathizing with sadness____   Other(specify)_____ ____

Appendix C

Subject Consent Form

This research examines the feelings and opinions of professional school counselors and students regarding grief intervention services offered in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools. The goal of this study is to evaluate a questionnaire that measures these as part of this study. Before completing the questionnaire, we would like you to read and then sign the consent form, indicating that you understand the potential risks and benefits of participation, and that you understand your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please contact Jamin Barth, the primary researcher, at (715)232-0887.

Risks: There may be a slight chance that the questions on this survey will bring back uncomfortable feelings about a particular event. The researcher foresees no other risks in completing this survey.

Benefits: There is no direct and immediate benefit to you by participating in this study. However, the results of this study will help shape effective and prompt interventions for crises in schools.

Confidentiality of Responses: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential. The information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed.

Right to Withdraw or Decline to Participate: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

Note: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or research advisor and second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715)232-1126.

I attest that I have read and understood the above description, including potential

risks, benefits, and my rights as a participant, and that all of my questions about

the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my informed

consent to participate in this research study.

Signature_____ **Date**_____

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