

# IECA Fall Conference

Los Angeles, CA • November 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> , 2018

**Grieving The Loss of Idealized Adolescence:  
Supporting clients and families on  
the process of acceptance**

Evan Oppenheimer, M.A., LMHC  
True North Wilderness Program

Elizabeth W. Donnelly, M.S., CEP,  
Atlanta Educational Consultants

Collaboration. Engagement. Impact!



Didn't see it coming....



# Topics of Discussion

- ▶ Assessment, empathy and understanding where people are in their process
  - ▶ Patterns, positive intentions, pattern exhaustion
- ▶ Grief and loss as defined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and how it manifests in transition to and from treatment
  - ▶ Providing expertise while letting go of outcomes
    - ▶ Case discussions







# Grief, Loss and Connection in parent-adolescent relationships

- Loss is one aspect of psychosocial transition, the psychological change that takes place whenever people are faced with the need to undertake a major revision of their assumptions about the world. (Parks, 1988)
- Adolescents who have more conflicts with their parents have more externalizing and internalizing problems; lower levels of self-esteem, well-being, and adjustment to school; and more frequent substance use (Tucker, 2003).
- Parent-adolescent conflicts are adaptive for relational development when parents and adolescents can switch flexibly between a range of positive and negative emotions (Branje, 2018).
- Once expectations about the relationship are renegotiated in a mutually satisfactory way and parents reduce their control, conflict usually diminishes and parents and adolescents may reestablish closeness (Branje, 2018).



# Assessment, empathy and understanding their process

- ▶ What is important to this parent/student? What do they want? What do they need to feel emotionally comfortable?
- ▶ Noticing primary response: What do you unconsciously find yourself wanting to do in relation with this student? (i.e. reassure, get in a fight, cut slack, etc.)
- ▶ Doing Something Different
- ▶ Helping find value and meaning
- ▶ Building trust and normalizing
- ▶ Psychoeducation and understanding spectrum of care...
- ▶ ...Remember parents emotions and note they might not be taking it all in

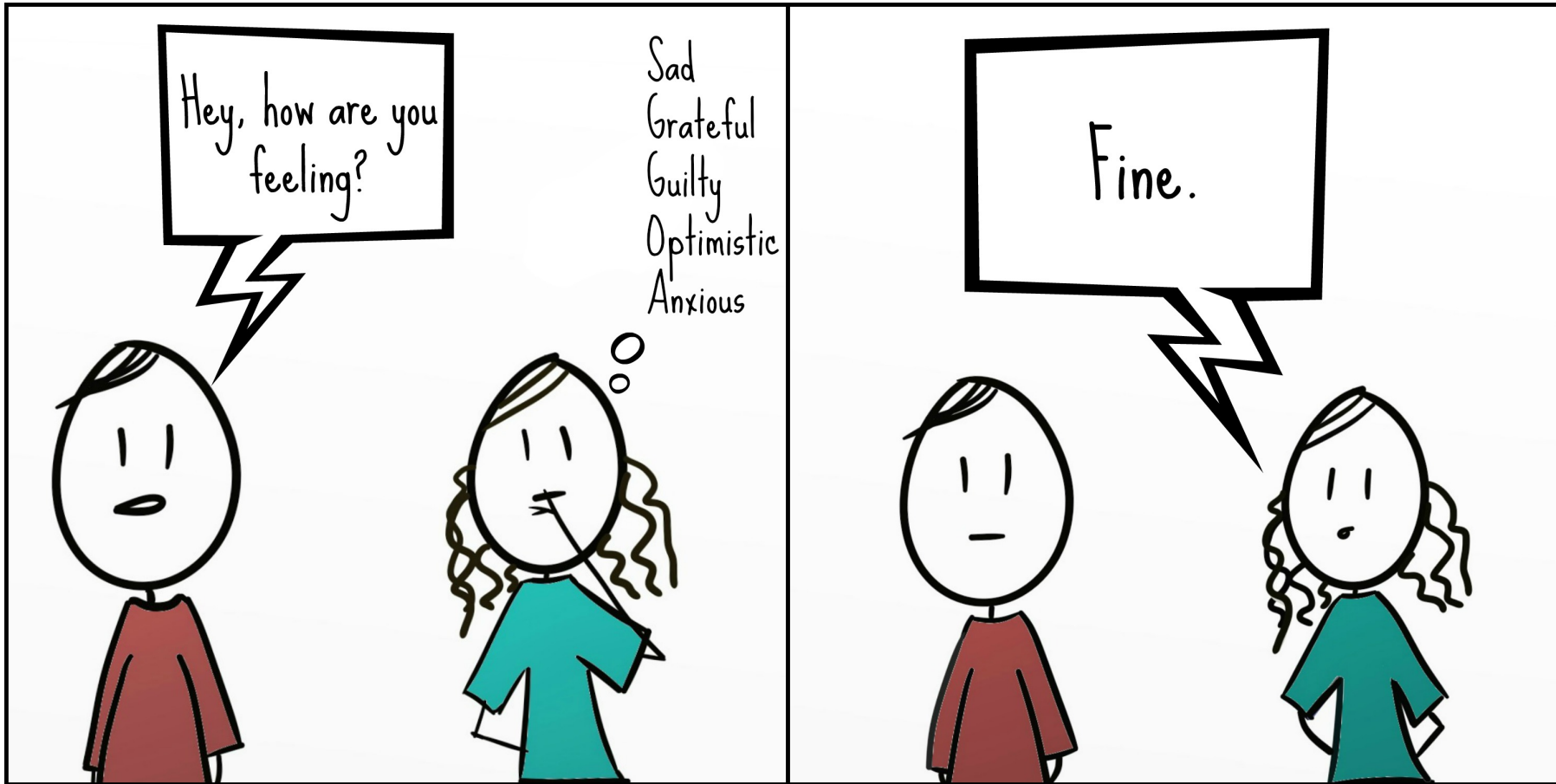


# Patterns, positive intentions and pattern exhaustion

- ▶ What is the underlying positive intention that is driving or motivating behavior?
- ▶ The purpose of pattern exhaustion is to show the student or parent that behavior patterns will no longer help them achieve their positive intentions
- ▶ The more students experience their old ways not working, the more frustrated, confused, and exhausted they will get, leading to a search for new methods.
- ▶ Our goal is to create a strong, congruent desire for change, and an awareness of their stuck-ness.
- ▶ Exhaust patterns though boundaries and rapport building
- ▶ Pattern Exhaustion vs. Hopelessness and Desperation



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Denial

- ▶ Clinging to a false, preferable reality
- ▶ Patterns, positive intentions and pattern exhaustion
- ▶ “Rescue me” and “I hate you” letters
- ▶ Supporting parents with holding a boundary and challenging patterns
- ▶ Common patterns we see: stoicism, running away, distraction





# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## *Savage Chickens*

by Doug Savage



[www.savagechickens.com](http://www.savagechickens.com)



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Anger

- ▶ "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?"; "Why would this happen?".
- ▶ Frustration directed at proximate individuals
- ▶ Patterns we see: Blaming, Rationalizing, intimidation



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Bargaining

- ▶ Avoiding cause of grief
- ▶ “I promise I will always/never do \_\_\_\_\_ again!”
  - ▶ The magical wilderness effect: “I’m Good!”
  - ▶ Patterns we see: pleasing, negotiation



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...





# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Depression

- ▶ "I'm so sad, why bother with anything?"
  - ▶ Existential crisis
- ▶ Patterns: Suicidal ideation, shut downs, stuck-ness, resistance
- ▶ Exasperation of clinical depression and how it differs from grieving

## Grief:

1. Sadness, despair, mourning
2. Fatigue or low energy
3. Tears
4. Loss of appetite
5. Poor sleep
6. Poor concentration
7. Happy and sad memories
8. Mild feelings of guilt

## Major Depression:

1. Worthlessness
2. Exaggerated guilt
3. Suicidal thoughts
4. Low self-esteem
5. Powerlessness
6. Helplessness
7. Agitation
8. Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
9. Exaggerated fatigue



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Acceptance

"It's going to be okay."; "I can't fight it; I may as well prepare for it."

### The parents perspective:

“Our expectation going into True North was that our son would come home afterward and it took us awhile to process the fact that coming home is not what will be best for him or our family. That makes me really sad. We never expected or planned for private school, let alone a Wilderness Program or therapeutic boarding school. We never expected or planned for the type of year we just had or his need for support being at such a life or death level. That might sound melodramatic, but that is how it feels for me.”



# Stages of grief and how it manifests...

## Acceptance

### The students perspective:

“True North was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. But it was also one of the most helpful and rewarding. I learned so much about myself as well as other people, and I’ll cherish that knowledge forever. But my therapeutic journey isn’t over. I’m going to a therapeutic boarding school after True North. That’s scary. It’s scary to go to an environment so much less controlled than True North but also so much more controlled than life before True North. I’ll have to use the tools of perseverance, positivity, acceptance, open mindedness, and love I learned here and apply them to the real world. I don’t entirely know how to do that yet but I’m excited to try.”



# Thank You!!!

For a copy of this presentation, please visit:  
[www.truenorthwilderness.com/handouts](http://www.truenorthwilderness.com/handouts)

Contact us!

[evan@truenorthwilderness.com](mailto:evan@truenorthwilderness.com)

[betsy@atleduconsults.com](mailto:betsy@atleduconsults.com)

Please fill out the evaluation form after this session—your feedback helps IECA plan future conferences.



Collaboration. Engagement. Impact!



# References

Parks, C.M., 1988. Bereavement as a psychosocial transition: Process of adaptation to change. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 44, No. 3. 1988, pp. 53-6s  
[https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/49707504/j.1540-4560.1988.tb02076.x20161019-27160-3jphde.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1541253310&Signature=549P7tYztCpRav9%2BDobDfypE1GM%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DBereavement\\_as\\_a\\_Psychosocial\\_Transition.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/49707504/j.1540-4560.1988.tb02076.x20161019-27160-3jphde.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1541253310&Signature=549P7tYztCpRav9%2BDobDfypE1GM%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DBereavement_as_a_Psychosocial_Transition.pdf)

Tucker, C. J., McHale, S. M., & Crouter, A. C. (2003). Dimensions of mothers' and fathers' differential treatment of siblings: Links with adolescents' sex-typed personal qualities. *Family Relations*, 52, 82-89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00082.x>

Branje, S. (2018). Development of parent-adolescent relationships: Conflict interactions as a mechanism of change. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12, 3, 171-176. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12278>, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdep.12278>