



TAPS
Institute for Hope and Healing

**Underserved and Overlooked:
Supporting Widowed Parents**

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Presented by Boeing 




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Learning Objectives


By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the most current research findings on widowed parenthood;
2. Describe the four broad challenges facing widowed parents;
3. Define specific bereavement needs of these parents; and
4. Discuss interventions to support widowed parents and their families.

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Why Widowed Parents?

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Widowed Parenthood
Not Uncommon




- In U.S., ~200,000 persons between 25-50 die each year
- Many leave behind spouses and young children
- Military rates

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Widowed Parenthood
Vulnerable Population




- Younger widows/widowers have higher depression and grief (Zisook et al., 1993)
- Disrupted developmental trajectories
- Isolated from peers (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012)

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Widowed Parenthood
Impact on Family




- Parents assume responsibility for children's well-being
- Poorer outcomes for children (Brent et al., 2012; Tyrka et al., 2008)
- Parent psychological functioning affects children's coping (Sandler et al., 2016)

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The Research on Widowed Parenthood

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Research


- Overall, very few studies have focused on widowed parents
- Family Bereavement Program
 - Sandler and colleagues at Arizona State University
 - Intervention-based research
 - Relationship between lower psych distress in parents and better/healthier parenting practices

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Research Findings – UNC Studies

- Widowed fathers; children at home; death due to cancer
- Initial Findings (Park et al., 2015; Yopp et al., 2015)
 - Elevated depression
 - Elevated grief
 - High parenting-related stress
 - Reported meeting parenting expectations

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Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont'd.)

- Assessed how fathers adapted over the first two years
 - Total number of fathers: 252
 - Age: 46 years
 - Race: 89% Caucasian
 - Education: 74% college degrees
 - Income: 77% more than \$50,000/year

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Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont'd.)

Depression

CES-D Scores

Time Point	CES-D Score
0 month	28
6 month	23
12 month	19
18 month	18
24 month	17

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Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont'd.)

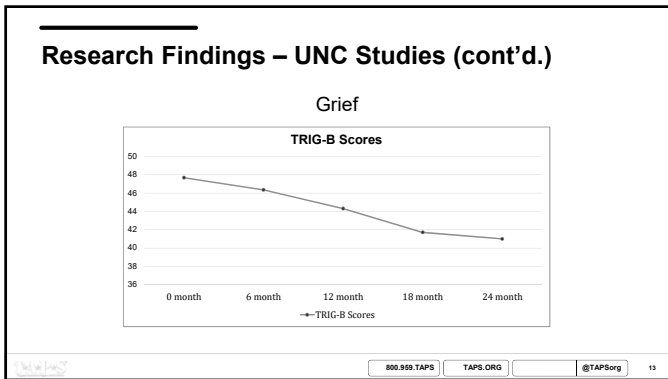
Depression

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- ### Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont'd.)
- Linear regression modeling for CES-D and TRIG-B
 - Significantly correlated at nearly all time intervals:
 - Widowed Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale
 - Kansas Parenting Satisfaction Scale
 - Parenting Adaptation Scale
 - TRIG-A
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Making Sense of What We Know

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Conceptualization

- Widowed parents prioritize parenting responsibilities over personal well-being
- Understandable, but comes with a cost
- Reasons why widowed parents may remain distressed longer than non-parents who are grieving a loss

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Four Broad Challenges of Widowed Parenthood

- Grieving the loss of a spouse/partner
- Helping children grieve the death of a parent
- Adapting to sole parenthood and household management
- Moving forward (dating, etc.)

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Counseling Widowed Parents

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Individual Counseling

- Recognize unique aspects of their situation
 - Youth; not the same as divorced parents
- Promote child-centered parenting approach
 - Balances emotional warmth with structure, consistent discipline
- Encourage realistic expectations
 - Concept of the "Good Enough Parent"

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Individual Counseling

- Promote self-care
 - Important to prioritize self, not just children
- **Outdated:** the Five Stages of Grief model
 - Dr. Kübler-Ross' initial work (1969) was based on clinical observations of terminally-ill patients
 - Grief is individualized, not linear, much more than five emotions

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A Framework for Understanding Grief

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The Dual Process of Coping with Bereavement


- Margaret Stroebe and Hank Schut (1999; 2010)
- Not prescriptive of emotions, sequence, or timeframe
- Suitable for any bereaved person
 - An especially good fit for widowed parents

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The Dual Process of Coping with Bereavement

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyOVKLR2pEs#action=share>

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Support Group

- Benefits for parents:
 - Connect with others in similar circumstances
 - Receive support and guidance from peers
 - Help others by sharing their own experiences
 - Appreciate that many experiences and stressors are "normal"
 - Learn from group facilitators

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Support Group

- The UNC Approach:
 - Separate groups for mothers and fathers
 - Provide childcare, dinner
 - Encourage discussion; no agenda for meetings
 - Guided by DPM
 - Meet on a monthly basis; staggered entry/exit ramps

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Learn more at
www.widowedparent.org

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Questions?

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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.



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Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

- April 25— *Double Whammy: Coping with the Death of a Spouse While Parenting a Grieving Child*
Presenter: **Justin M. Yopp**, PhD and **Tina Barrett**, EdD, LCPC
- June 20-21— *Helping Individuals and Families Coping with Grief: Best Practices for Bereavement Professionals*
Presenter: **Kenneth J. Doka**, PhD, MDiv

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