

NAVIGATING THE FAMILY AFTER A CHILD DEATH: TRAUMA- INFORMED COMMUNICATION

AND NOTIFICATION

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **Understand** the profound impact of grief and trauma on families experiencing child death.
- **Identify** best practices for delivering a death notification with compassion and clarity.
- **Apply** principles of trauma-informed communication during initial and ongoing interactions.
- **Develop** strategies for interviewing grieving caregivers effectively and sensitively.
- **Recognize** the importance of providing resources and follow-up support to families.
- **Explore** strategies for interagency coordination in





UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AND

TRAUMA: The Family's Experience

-
- **Grief:** Intense emotional suffering due to loss. Unique for child death.
 - **Trauma:** Psychological response to a deeply distressing event.
 - **Acute Stress Response:** Shock, disbelief, numbness, physical symptoms.
 - **Impact on Cognition:** Difficulty processing information, memory gaps, impaired decision-making.
 - **Emotional Overwhelm:** Intense sadness, anger, guilt, fear, helplessness.
 - **Sense of Betrayal:** If death is suspicious or involves others.
 - **No 'Right' Way to Grieve:** Diverse expressions, individual pace.



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BEST PRACTICES FOR DEATH NOTIFICATION: Preparation is Key

- In-Person Delivery
- Two-Person Team
- Identify Family
- Private Setting
- Have Information Ready
- Anticipate Questions



BEST PRACTICES FOR DEATH NOTIFICATION: Delivery

- Direct Language
- Pause and Allow Reaction
- Offer Comfort & Support
- Repeat Information
- Avoid Blame
- Outline Next Steps (Briefly)



CASE STUDY

Notification Prep

Scenario: You are part of a team preparing to notify parents that their 6-month-old infant has died unexpectedly at a daycare.



- How would you prepare for their likely emotional reactions?
- Who from your agency would you want with you?

- What 3 pieces of information must you be absolutely sure to convey clearly?
- What are 2 things you should avoid saying or doing during the notification?



TRAUMA- INFORMED COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Always lead with

patience & empathy:

Slow down, listen

actively, validate

feelings



Safety

Physical and emotional safety first.

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Be honest about what you know/don't know.

Peer Support

Connect families with those with similar experiences (if available).

Collaboration & Mutuality

Partner with families where possible.

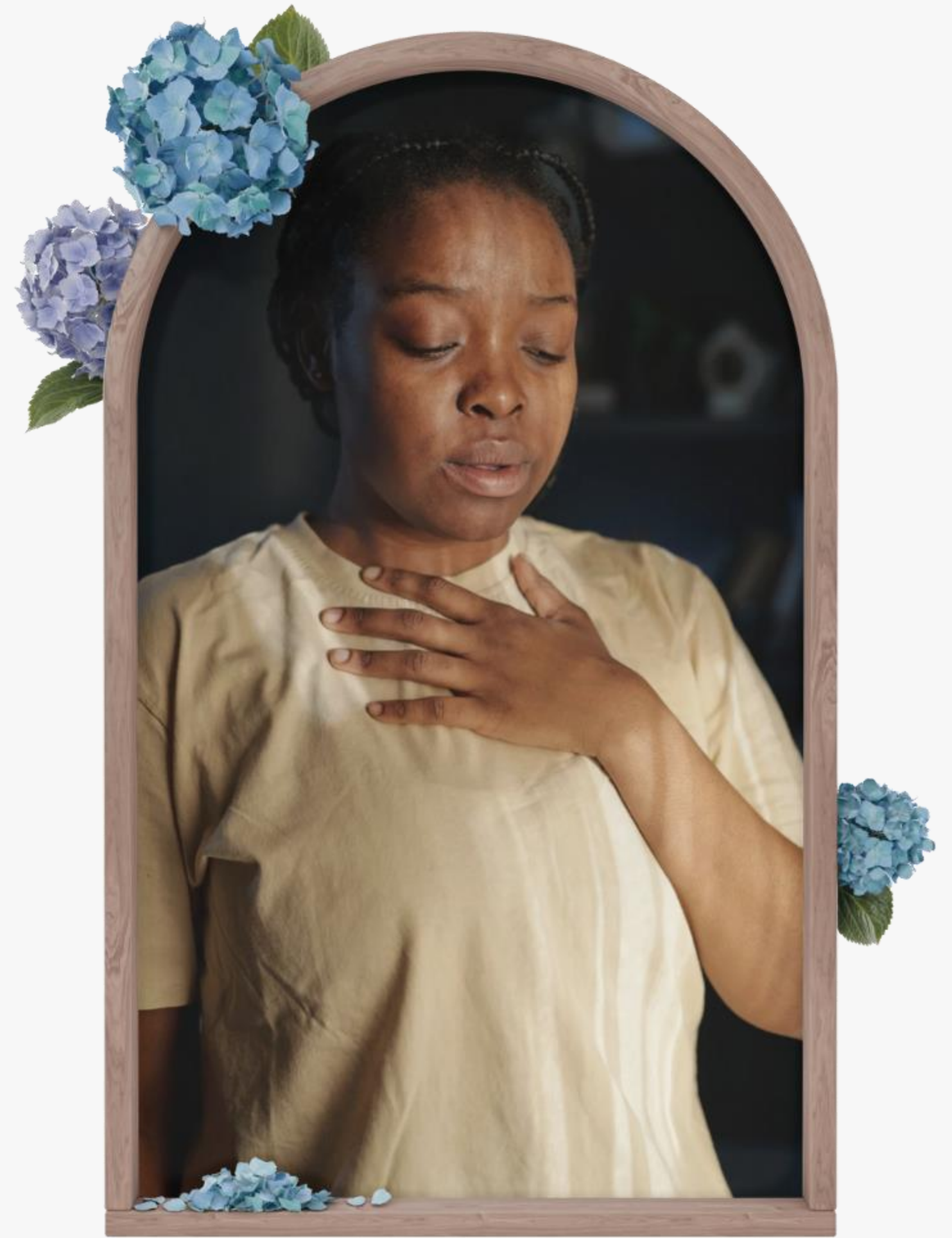
Empowerment, Voice, Choice

Give options, respect decisions (within limits).

INTERVIEWING GRIEVING

CAREGIVERS: Balancing Needs

- The Family's Needs Drive the Pace
- Collaborative Interview
- Clear Purpose
- Open-Ended Questions
- Acknowledge Grief
- Avoid Leading Questions or Judgment
- Document Everything



COMMON CAREGIVER REACTIONS

**During
Interviews**

- Shock/Numbness
- Disbelief/Denial
- Intense Crying/Wailing
- Anger/Frustration
- Guilt/Self-Blame
- Confusion/Memory Gaps
- Evasiveness/Minimization
- Physical Symptoms



CASE STUDY

Navigating Evasive Answers

Scenario: During an interview, a parent, when asked about the last time they saw their child alive, consistently responds with 'I don't know, it's all a blur.'



- What trauma-informed approach would you use to rephrase the question or explore this?

- What support could you offer the parent at this moment?
- What is the balance between needing information and respecting their distress?



PROVIDING RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Beyond the
Investigation

-
- Immediate Connections
 - Local Grief Support Groups
 - Financial Assistance
 - Legal Aid
 - Faith-Based Support
 - SUID Resources
 - Follow-Up Contact



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

**What We Can & Cannot
Provide**

- Honesty about Timeline
- Limited Information Initially
- Role of Agencies
- Confidentiality
- No Guarantees of Closure/Justice
- Focus on Process



INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

During Family Communication

- Unified Message
- Designated Spokesperson/Lead
- Pre-Briefings
- Debriefings
- Shared Information Protocol
- Respectful Cross-Agency Conduct



LEGAL & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Remember Your Investigative Mandate:

Legal duty to
investigate thoroughly
and impartially



Family Rights

Right to information, privacy (within limits), compassionate treatment.

Confidentiality vs. Need-to-Know

Balancing legal and ethical obligations.

Conflicts of Interest

Investigator's personal beliefs, prior history.

Sensitivity

Adapting practices to diverse survivor needs.

Media Protocols

Protect family privacy while informing public.

SELF-CARE FOR INVESTIGATORS

The Cost of
Caring

-
- Vicarious Trauma
 - Burnout
 - Impact Widespread
 - Several Warning Signs
 - Mitigation Strategies:
 - Peer Support
 - Supervision
 - Self-Care
 - Professional Help
 - Scheduled Breaks





KEY TAKEAWAYS

-
- **Profound Impact:** Child death is uniquely traumatic.
 - **Trauma-Informed Approach:** Essential for all interactions.
 - **Notification Best Practices:** In-person, two-person, direct language, privacy, support.
 - **Interviewing:** Pace with family's needs, acknowledge grief, clear purpose.
 - **Resources:** Connect families with grief support, victim services.
 - **Interagency Coordination:** Unified message, lead spokesperson.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

- **National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG):**
<https://nacg.org/>
- **The Compassionate Friends:**
<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>
- National Center for PTSD (Trauma-Informed Care resources):
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THANK YOU

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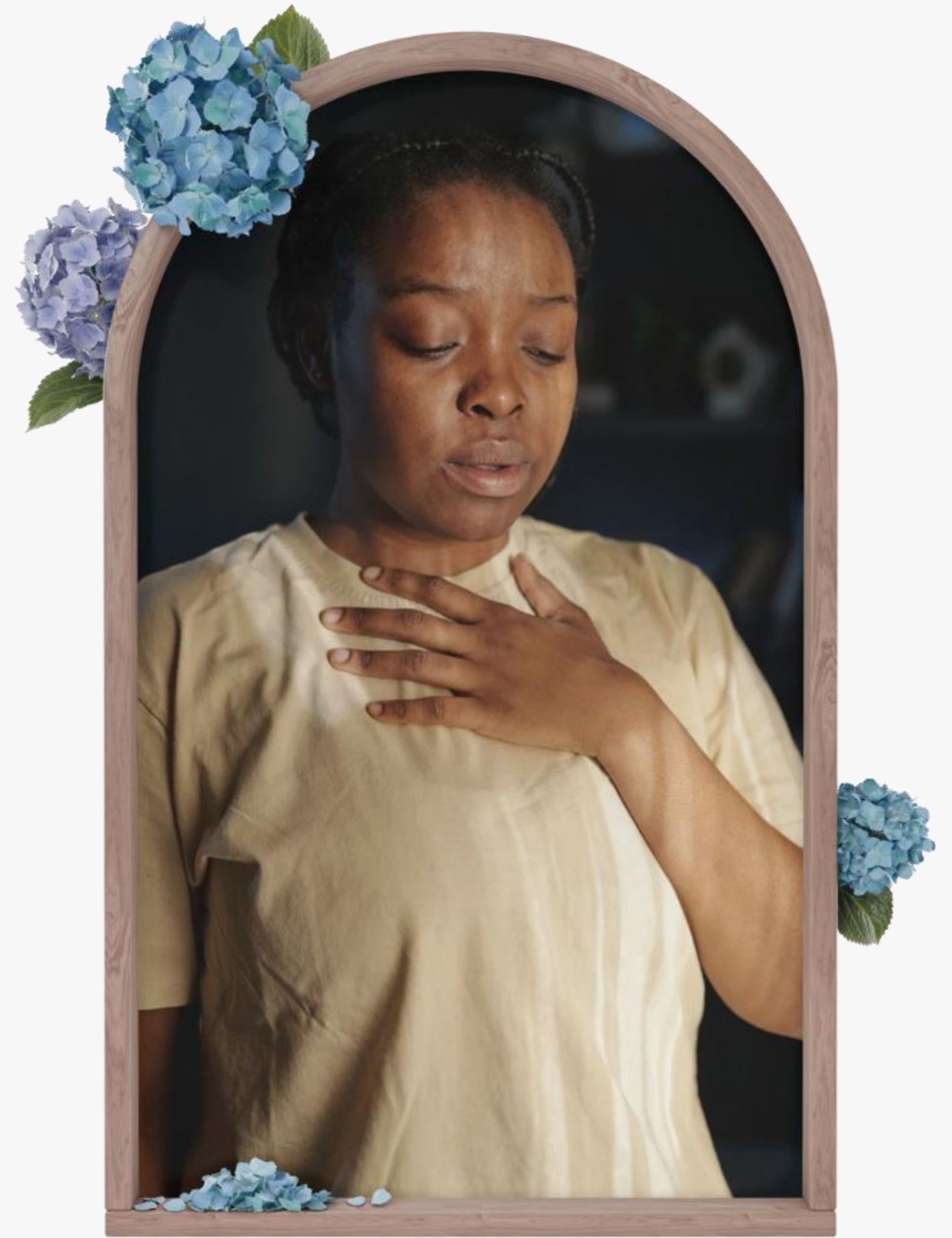
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