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## **New Study Finds Grief Therapy May Reduce Violent Behavior Among Incarcerated Youth**

*Study findings demonstrate the feasibility of treating maladaptive grief reactions among incarcerated youth*

A new research study published in the American Psychological Association's journal, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, and co-authored by Dr. Julie Kaplow, executive director of the Trauma and Grief Center at the [Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute](https://www.mmhpi.org), finds that introducing grief-focused treatment to incarcerated adolescents and young adults may reduce maladaptive grief symptoms and improve behavioral functioning.

Most detained youth report the death of a close loved one, [with 70% experiencing at least two or more significant losses](#). The majority of these are due to homicide. Although incarcerated adolescents are reported to experience significantly higher rates of bereavement than those in the general population, few prior studies have examined the effectiveness of evidence-based, grief-focused treatments for these youths.

The [study](#), "**Addressing Grief Reactions Among Incarcerated Adolescents and Young Adults Using Trauma and Grief Component Therapy**," aimed to determine whether male adolescents incarcerated in a juvenile justice facility would participate in and benefit from a grief-focused, evidence-based group treatment program.

The study's research focused on 63 male adolescents incarcerated at a secure correctional facility in the midwestern United States. The participants in the group received treatment for symptoms of maladaptive grief using an evidence-based intervention called [Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents \(TGCTA\)](#). The group's grief reactions and behaviors were evaluated prior to and following the treatment.

The results of the study revealed significant decreases in specific grief reactions, including separation distress (yearning and longing for the person who died) and circumstance-related distress (preoccupying thoughts about the way that they died) among the cohort. Further, the study results showed that the implementation of TGCTA improved outcomes in behavioral functioning. Notably, in the five-to-15-week period after the group versus the five-to-15-week period before the group, there was a 50% reduction in the number of behavioral incident reports involving TGCTA

group participants. These findings speak to the utility and effectiveness of grief-focused interventions for bereaved, incarcerated adolescents.

While juvenile justice systems have become increasingly trauma-informed in recent years by recognizing the impact of trauma on criminal behaviors, few have recognized the role of bereavement or grief. The study findings suggest that addressing maladaptive grief may be more effective than addressing other forms of trauma when attempting to reduce violent behavior among incarcerated youth.

"In this study, we found that the use of a grief-focused treatment had a major effect on incarcerated youth. The treatment was shown to not only reduce grief symptoms, but also improve behavior," Kaplow said. "By emphasizing the importance of grief, these results offer a promising glimpse into the future of mental health care in the juvenile justice system."

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### **About the Trauma and Grief Center**

The Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center is dedicated to raising the standard of care and increasing access to best-practice care among traumatized and bereaved children, adolescents, and their families. The Center is also home to a virtual learning library that offers free webinars and resources focusing on childhood trauma and grief to parents and caregivers, mental health clinicians, educators, health care providers, law enforcement, and other professionals working with children and adolescents who have experienced trauma and loss. Learn more at <https://tagcenter.org>.

### **About the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute**

Launched in 2014, the Meadows Institute helps Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local, state, and national leaders identify equitable systemic solutions to mental health needs and has become Texas's most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Meadows Institute is making a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas and national leaders shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, addressing the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms, and helping all people with mental health needs recover and be well. Learn more at <https://mmhpi.org/>.