



# From loss to meaning: therapeutic group processes in parental grief after pediatric cancer

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## Abstract

**Background** The death of a child due to cancer constitutes one of the most devastating experiences for parents and is associated with profound emotional, relational, and existential consequences. Pediatric psycho-oncology highlights the need for interventions that go beyond symptom reduction and address grief as a complex process involving emotional expression, social connection, and meaning reconstruction. However, qualitative research exploring parents' lived experiences of grief-focused group therapy remains limited.

**Objective** This study aimed to explore the impact of therapeutic group interventions on parental grief following the loss of a child to cancer, focusing on emotional adjustment, social adaptation, and processes of meaning-making. Additionally, it examined parents' subjective perceptions of the group as a resource for grief elaboration.

**Method** A qualitative, descriptive-interpretative design was employed. Participants were parents who had attended grief-focused therapeutic groups after the death of a child due to pediatric cancer. Data were collected through focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify shared categories and processes of meaning emerging from participants' narratives.

**Results** The findings revealed interconnected processes, including a transformation from fear of emotional overwhelm to increased emotional tolerance, a reconceptualization of grief as a non-pathological and ongoing life process, and the reconstruction of the bond with the deceased child through symbolic continuity and legacy. The group emerged as a key therapeutic context characterized by mutual recognition, reciprocity, and sustained emotional support. Participation also facilitated social re-engagement, redefinition of life priorities, and greater existential coherence.

**Conclusions** Therapeutic group interventions represent a valuable clinical resource in pediatric psycho-oncology, fostering emotional integration, relational support, and meaning reconstruction in parental grief. These findings support the relevance of group-based approaches and underscore the need for further qualitative research and the development of structured intervention models.

**Keywords** Pediatric psycho-oncology · Focus group · Grief · Intervention

## Introduction