

## **CHILDREN'S GRIEF**

- 1) Children need to be repeatedly reassured that their physical needs (place to eat and sleep) and emotional needs (love) will be met.
- 2) Children need to be allowed to talk and cry.
- 3) The circumstances of the death may need to be explained.
- 4) In discussing death with a child, do not use the word "SLEEP".
- 5) Allow child to have pictures of lost loved ones and other family members.
- 6) A child's favorite bear, blanket, etc., should be allowed and encouraged.
- 7) Children should be allowed to talk about lost loved ones when they are ready. Also, adults in the family should be encouraged to talk about the lost loved ones in the presence of the children.
- 8) Daily tasks/schedules are important to children who are grieving. They tend to feel safer when their routine is maintained as much as possible.
- 9) Refrain from making any unnecessary changes in the child's life.
- 10) Children who have experienced loss through death often fear for the lives of other family members. These children may also fear for their own lives.
- 11) It is important for children to attend funerals. If a child is unable to attend the initial service, a small private service should be held again later in order for the child to experience the funeral.
- 12) Children need to be told repeatedly that the death is not their fault (e.g. "Mommy and Daddy died in a bad accident - it was not anyone's fault").
- 13) Let children know that they can still write letters and draw pictures for their lost loved ones.

## **Guidelines for Helping Children Who Have Experienced the Death of a Loved One**

1. Take the word “death” off the taboo list. Allow it to become a concept that can be discussed openly. Understanding is a life-long process that continues from childhood through old age.
2. Understand that mourning and sadness are appropriate for people of all ages.
3. Allow children to release their emotions. Let them call their feelings by the rightful names. It is not the expression of these legitimate emotions that is harmful, but their suppression.
4. Contact your children’s school and inform them of the loss in the family.
5. Seek help if you feel unable to deal with your children during this crisis.
6. Do not tell a child that he or she is now the man or woman of the house, or a replacement.
7. Do not use stories and fairy tales as an explanation for the mystery of death. Never cover up the facts with a fiction or a confusing interpretation that you will some day have to repudiate. A child’s greatest need is for trust and truth.
8. Do not let your children believe that you have all the final answers.
9. Do not be afraid to express your own emotions of grief
10. Continue to give assurance of love and support
11. It is important to note that how we speak to our children about death is dependent on where they are developmentally and that we don’t need to offer more information than the child is really seeking.

## TOOLS CHILDREN USE TO EXPRESS GRIEF

1. **Artwork:** Drawing, painting, coloring, pastels, finger paints, clay. Symbols, lines and colors tell their story. The energy they use is a release. Accept what they draw; do not analyze it. Let them tell you about it. Focus on the ideas and expressions.
2. **Photo album:** Looking through it together and recounting events OR making a photo album/memory book with pictures and keepsakes.
3. **Treasure box:** Special keepsakes from the loved one that can be pulled out.
4. **Video tape:** Viewing old tapes from holidays and special occasions OR making a video tape while the person is still living.
5. **Storytelling:** Allow child to recall memories of the person. Share your own memories.
6. **Reading Children's Books:** Many books are available that touch on the issues of death and dying. Allow the child to ask questions and make comments.
7. **Play:** Puppets, dolls, imaginary play, skits. Allow the child to play without intervening OR play along if you are invited. The energy of play and expressing is the key factor.
8. **Ritual:** Together putting away clothes, having a memorial service, writing a poem, planting a tree, rose bush, etc.

## HOW ART IS HELPFUL TO THE GRIEVING CHILD

- Art is a form of symbolic communication that is often non-threatening, supports the child's developmentally concrete way of communication and helps to establish therapeutic rapport.
- The art making process and product may help others to more accurately see / feel the child's experience.
- Because making art is an active process, the child making art is assuming an active role in the grief / mourning / healing process.
- Art serves as a tangible container for the intense internal feelings of grief.
- Because art taps the unconscious, hidden fears / questions / concerns can surface safely, whereas then the child can more easily face and integrate this information.
- The child can draw his / her story and talk about the characters / events in the picture, rather than talking about oneself. This may provide safe emotional distance if needed.
- A child's graphic depiction of her / his understandings about the causes(s) of illness / death may reveal misunderstandings and misconceptions thus providing opportunities for clarification and adjustment.
- Dreams / nightmares can be drawn and talked about often leading to less disturbed sleep.
- Through manipulating materials, such as pounding clay and crumbling / ripping paper, a child can safely express his / her rage.
- A child can give visual form to his / her fear through imaginary characters and draw out the feared events; through the process gaining a sense of mastery and confidence to face the fear.
- Art may be a vehicle for completing unfinished business and saying goodbye.
- Because art is tangible, it provides a concrete means for a child to continually refer to for deeper understanding of his / her grieving process as well as observe growth and change.
- A child can use art to draw memories of the deceased loved one, thus strengthening the memory.
- The child can use the art to create personal rituals of remembering the person.
- A child can use art to explore life without the loved one and ways of coping with change.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY - HOW TO HELP A GRIEVING CHILD**  
**For Parents and Teachers**

Campbell, Alla Bozarth, Life is Goodbye, Life is Hello

Grieving well through all kinds of loss. Uses poetry and prose in this excellent guide.

Gaffney, Donna, The Seasons of Grief

Grollman, Earl, Explaining Death to Children

Grollman, Earl, Talking about Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child

Includes children's read-along, parents' guide for explaining adult death, and resources by age group.

Grollman, Earl, When Your Loved-One is Dying

Guidance and reassurance for family and friends prior to a loved- one's death. Easy to read, because title and contents are explicit.

Jackson, E. N., Telling a Child About Death

Kushner, Harold, When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Schiff, Harriet Sarnoff, The Bereaved Parent

Written by a mother whose child died, this excellent book addresses grieving, guilt, powerlessness, marriage, siblings, communication and religion.

Wass, H. and Corr, C. A., Childhood and Death

Wass, H. and Corr, C. A., Helping Children Cope With Death; Guidelines and Resources

Wolfe, Alan, Helping Children Cope With Grief

**K-3rd Grade - Ages 5-8**

Bryan, Mellonie & Ingpen, Robert, Lifetimes

Buscaglia, Leo, The Fall of Freddy the Leaf

The author puts death and loss in the natural order of things - a continuum in the experience of life. A good story for children of all ages.

**Bibliography - page 3**

**Zolotow, Charlotte, My Grandson Lew**

This book illustrates the value of memories as a 6-year-old Lewis remembers things about his grandpa who died 4 years earlier.

**Grades 4-8 - Ages 8-13**

**Blume, Judy, Tiger Eyes**

A story about a family struggling with grief and with each other after a father is killed. They find ways to move forward through their grief.

**Buchanan, Doris, A Taste of Blackberries**

A little boy is confronted by death, grief and guilt when his best friend dies from a bee sting. A sensitive story of how the boy comes to accept his friend's death.

**Carter, Forrest, The Education of Little Tree**

A story of a Cherokee boy in the 1930's who experiences poignant losses and the encouragement of his grandparents.

**Clardy, Andrea, Dusty Was My Friend**

A simple story about 8 year old Benjamin who remembers his friend Dusty killed in a car accident. He finds consolation in a special activity.

**LeShan, Eda, Learning to Say Goodbye When a Parent Dies**

Practical and caring advice that can be understood by young children and adolescents.

**Little, Jean, Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird**

Young Jeremy and his sister experience the illness and death of their father. When the family starts over, Jeremy follows through with his father's wish and realizes his father's gifts.

**Miles, Miska, Annie and the Old One**

A young Navajo girl comes to terms with life and death as natural cycles.

**Paterson, Katherine, Bridge to Terabithia**

The story of the friendship of 10 year old Jess and his class friend, Leslie. Jess must deal with Leslie's death and the secret kingdom of Terabithia enables him to cope.

**Rafes, Eric, A Kids Book About Death and Dying By and For Kids**

Written by children, ages 11-14.

**White, E. B., Charlotte's Web**

A classic story about friendship and loss and the feelings after the death of a friend, and how memories help to keep them alive in our minds.